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A HERO'S WORK.

VOL. I.

A HERO'S WORK.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A HERO'S WORK.

CHAPTER I.

THE STEPMOTHER.

“No, be assured, you shall not find me, daughter,
After the slander of most step-mothers,
Evil ey'd unto you.”



THE Rectory of Crofton lay bathed in the pleasant sunshine of a bright spring morning. Flowers seemed to send forth additional fragrance, perfuming the air with their spirit of purity and perfection, even as they scented the air of Paradise so many ages ago. Birds warbled merrily their songs of love and content, and the skylark darted towards heaven, pouring out his “full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art;” the higher he soared, the more energetically he sang.

All without the Rectory doors was peace and joy—within them was bustle and expectation; for the Rector and his newly-married wife were to arrive in the course of the day. Aunt Jane, the Rector's maiden sister, who had come down from London to set things in order, made a tour, for the twentieth time, through the whole house. When she had quite satisfied herself that everything was in proper order, ready for the new mistress, she took out her knitting, and sat down quietly near the drawing-room window, to await the expected arrivals, and think over the expediency of second marriages.

Grace Carlton, a bright-eyed brunette of about seventeen, seated herself at her aunt's feet, in an evident state of discontent and irritation. She sat idly turning over the leaves of a book, now and then casting an impatient glance across the meadows, boding and dreading the advent of her father's second choice. Her sister Lena opened the window, and stepped out upon the gravel walk, looking as sweet and fresh as the May morning itself.

Few could see Lena Carlton without a feeling of attraction towards her ; even the slight expression of disquietude that now shaded her face perhaps added to her loveliness. Her eyes, “too expressive to be blue, too lovely to be grey,” were tender, trusting, and true ; they beamed with a soft light, which a painter would find it difficult to portray ; and even her hair—that mute ornament that God has given to woman—had a marvellous expression in every rippling wave. It was of that light yellow tinge the Venetian artists loved to paint, and which the Emperor Constantine, with more than a woman’s vanity, degraded himself by falsely wearing. If Lena Carlton’s eyes and hair were perfection, the critics would not pronounce so decidedly upon the shape of her nose. It was neither aquiline, Grecian, Roman, nor *retroussé*, but what is sometimes called a “sensible nose.” However defective it might have been as a separate feature, her face would have suited no other, and no one ever felt inclined to find fault with it. Her mouth was exquisitely

formed—the upper lip short and curved, with a world of meaning. Had Titian seen her, he would have been inclined to paint another Venus.

Lena looked across the meadow towards the road that skirted it, along which her father, with his new wife, was to pass, and an involuntary sigh escaped her. She desired to receive affectionately her new mother, but she feared the remembrance of the one she had lost would create in her heart a feeling of dislike and distrust towards the new-comer, rather than that of welcome.

As she walked slowly up and down the gravel walk, she paused occasionally at the drawing-room window to exchange a few words with her aunt or sister. The elder lady endeavoured to impress her nieces with a higher sense of duty than they seemed to possess.

“It’s no use talking, Aunt Jane,” said Lena, stepping into the room; “they say every house has its skeleton—ours comes in the shape of a stepmother.”

“Yes,” rejoined Grace; “but most people can keep their skeleton out of sight—we shall never be quit of ours, unless we are sleeping; it will be the torment of our lives. I can’t think what papa could have been dreaming of when he determined to bring a strange woman here to head the table, rule the house, and scold us girls, as, of course, she will. She shall not rule me, though, that I’m determined!”

Here Grace curled her lip, and threw herself back in her chair, with all the dignity of her seventeen years.

“I am quite grieved to hear you speak so undutifully of your father, Grace,” replied her aunt, with some severity. “Even if he had committed the most imprudent act, it is not your place to censure it.”

“I can’t help it,” said Grace, half crying, “it is such a great and sudden change; everything will be so different now—home will never be like home again. A new mistress always causes a revolution in every way—what will not a new

mother do? I am sure papa will never be the same kind father to us now as he was before."

"You have no right to suppose that he will change, unless, indeed, your own ungracious manners cause his affection to cool, or his authority to hold stronger sway. Of course he cannot countenance the rude or disrespectful behaviour of his children to his wife. Your deportment to her will greatly influence his bearing towards you. I am sure he will appreciate any kind attention of yours to his new-married wife; and if you exhibit any symptoms of disrespect or dislike to her, he will acutely feel it, if not resent it." She paused a moment, then, drawing Grace towards her, added affectionately—"Don't think me hard-hearted, Gracie darling, or fancy that I do not sympathise with you, for indeed I do sincerely. I know it is a trying occasion for all—for him, for her, as well as for you. I hardly know which to pity most; but remember this, if anything goes wrong, the world will be all on your side; this knowledge

ought to make you doubly careful not to win undue sympathy for yourself, or cast undeserved blame on her."

"You weigh everything in the scales of justice, Aunt Jane," said Lena. "It is easy to chalk out the path of duty, but a very difficult matter to keep in it. For my part, I almost agree with Grace, it will be a hard task to behave even politely to Mrs. Carlton—we remember mamma too well; it will be bitter, very bitter, to see another take her place. In a strange house, perhaps, we might not feel it quite so much; but here her memory seems to linger round everything—indeed, while we are living amongst the same things that surrounded her, I don't quite feel as if we had lost her. Sometimes I even fancy I see her going about the house in her old sweet way. Now a stranger is to take her place. There is her picture, too—it has always stood there in sight—her eye seems to follow us, sometimes smiling, sometimes looking sad, as I fancy it is looking now, as if she knew she was in her grave forgotten.

Now I suppose it will be turned to the wall."

Lena's heart swelled, and her eyes filled with tears, as they lingered regretfully on the life-like portrait of her dead mother. Her thoughts wandered back to that day when the grave had closed over her. She remembered it all so well—the closed shutters, the silent house, and black, black everywhere; the subdued sobs that seemed to thrill through the whole household, as the dark pall fluttered down the oak staircase, and the bearers descended with their dull funereal tramp, that seemed to wound the ear, and tread upon some sensitive nerve at every step. All this was long ago, but it seemed to have happened only yesterday. Lena was silent for awhile. Feelings deeper than sorrow, fiercer than anger, seemed at war within her. At last, dashing the tears away, she said abruptly,

"It is no use talking, aunt—if an angel were to come down from heaven to take my mother's place I should hate her with all my heart!"

"You are both unreasonable and unjust," re-

monstrated Aunt Jane; "an injustice to the living can do no honour to the dead. I neither wish nor expect you to receive Mrs. Carlton as though you loved her—that would be unnatural—almost impossible. I only ask you to receive her with the respect due to your father's wife, and judge her by the light of truth and justice. Bear with her faults, Lena, if you expect her to bear with yours."

"Well, I'll try," replied Lena, with an effort; "but the very name of a stepmother brings a bad odour with it."

"Hush! here they are!" exclaimed Grace, springing to her feet, as a carriage drove briskly round the gravelled way, and stopped at the hall-door.

The usual bustle and stir ensued; the whole household was on the alert to catch a glimpse of the new mistress. Lena and Grace had always sprung forward to meet their father before he had crossed the threshold. Now a feeling of nervous trepidation seized them. They knew they ought

not to keep back; they could not venture to go forward; they felt as if their father, their own kind father, had grown a stranger to them; they were shy and awkward at the idea of meeting him. However, when they heard his old genial voice in the hall, they conquered their timidity, threw open the drawing-room door, and in a moment were in his arms. He was always kind and gentle, but there was something touchingly tender in his caresses now, as he kissed them again and again; there was an eloquence in the expression of his eye, as well as in the tone of his voice, that seemed to assure them of his unchanged love.

Lena met his look, and understood it well—indeed, at that moment, she felt it would be as impossible as cruel for a stranger to stand between her and her father's heart. Mrs. Carlton stood back till the first warmth of the meeting had subsided; then, with a winning, graceful manner, she came forward and embraced the two girls, calling each by name, in a way that showed they must have been the subject of frequent conversation.

Her ready tact saved Mr. Carlton the rather unpleasant task of introducing her to his daughters. She had silently noticed the free, unrestrained affection which seemed to come warm and fresh from their hearts, and told, more plainly than words could have done, that perfect confidence, as well as perfect love, existed between them. As she looked on the eloquent faces of her husband and his children, she inwardly resolved that no false note of her playing should bring discord into the harmony of the household.

She drew Lena to her side, and kissed her forehead, saying in a sweet tone—

“You must try and love me a little—I have already learnt to love you much from your father’s painting.”

Lena lifted her head, and fixed her eyes on Mrs. Carlton’s face. She might have been forty years old, she might have been much less, or even a little more; but she was one of those picturesque women whose age is a matter of indifference. She had a fine Spanish-looking face, with clear grey

eyes, thoughtful, and softened by an expression of gravity, as though she had known some great sorrow, and had learned to live it down. She bore evident marks of the great battle of life, which she had fought out bravely ; combating day by day with a host of carking cares and petty troubles ; but she had conquered them all, and buried them, as in old Continental cities they bury their dead and cover their graves with flowers. When Edward Carlton came to her, and asked her to take a place in his household, and renew—so far as maturity can renew—the dreams of their youth, she had not courage to say “No.”

As Lena looked upon Mrs. Carlton's face, heard her pleasant voice, and felt the warm pressure of her hand, she was softened ; and for a second forgot her resolution to hate her dreaded stepmother. The skeleton that was to mar the happiness of their future lives, came in a very pleasant guise—indeed, it seemed no skeleton at all ; and Lena felt that if Mrs. Carlton had been somebody else's stepmother, she could have loved her at sight.

As it was, she submitted to her affectionate greeting with a better grace than she could have believed herself capable of an hour ago.

Grace was taciturn and observant ; she spoke when spoken to, not else ; she had determined that none of Mrs Carlton's winning ways should make her regard her in any other light than as an intruder, and the common enemy of the house ; she felt herself aggrieved at Lena's evident impression in favour of the stepmother.

The evening passed away more pleasantly than perhaps might have been expected under existing circumstances. Once Mrs. Carlton looked intently on Lena's face, and said,

"You are very like your mother—at least, like what she was at your age."

"Why, did you know my mother, then?" exclaimed Lena, with unqualified surprise.

"Yes ; we were girls together."

"How strange!" said Lena. "Mamma was fond of talking of her girl companions, but I never heard her speak of you!"

“No,” said Mrs. Carlton, and there was a world of meaning in the utterance of that one word “no.” A grave shadow crossed her face, as though she were not inclined to say any more upon the subject, and was sorry she had even said so much.

It was no wonder that Lena had never heard her mother speak of Christina Creswick; if she had spoken of her at all, she must have told a tale of treachery and wrong, wherein she was the chief actor, and Christina a life-long sufferer. It is perhaps fortunate that parents have the liberty of keeping their own secrets out of sight of their children. If the father’s indiscretions and little peccadilloes were exposed to the son, the most respectable middle-aged parent, in spite of his wise homilies and prudent precepts, might lose some portion of his son’s esteem. As for the mother—well, a mother’s name, though laden with all the follies of unguided, wilful youth, is still sacred.

After Mrs. Carlton’s significant “no,” there was a momentary silence. She, however, adroitly

shifted the conversation, and they talked of other matters. There was much to be said and told on all sides; for Mr. Carlton had been absent from the Rectory at least four months. Presently Grace exclaimed abruptly,

“By-the-bye, papa, have you heard or seen anything of Laurence lately?”

A cloud came over Mr. Carlton’s face, as he answered—

“Yes, Grace; I hear of him too often. I wish to Heaven I heard less, or else heard better news.”

The girls fixed their eyes upon their father’s face, but asked no questions; they feared to hear ill news of Laurence, and they did not wish his faults to be told in Mrs. Carlton’s hearing. He was their brother—their only brother, and they loved him dearly; they were proud of his good looks and his gay careless manner; his cheery laugh and merry jokes always brought a fresh influence into the quiet life at the Rectory. They could not understand how much his idle extrava-

gances, and the loose dissipated habits of his life, grieved their father's heart. They admitted the general fact that "Laurence was a little too gay;" but they could not fathom the depth of meaning that was hidden beneath the simple words, "a little too gay." Hence it happened that they thought their father often harsh, and sometimes unkind, to his only son.

Mr. Carlton understood his daughter's inquiring eyes, and answered,

"Yes, Grace, it is no use mincing the matter—Laurence is coming home again in disgrace. I have a letter here from Messrs. West and Graham, in which they regret 'my son's incapacity for business.' I know what that means," he added, bitterly. "Of course they cannot tell me that my son is an idle reprobate. We shall have him home in three weeks!"

There was bitterness and disappointment in Mr. Carlton, as he spoke thus of his only son—that son to whose manhood he had looked forward with yearning hopes and lofty expectations. He

loved his daughters, but he would fain have been proud of his son. He had tried to carve out for him an upright, honourable career ; but the boy was wild and wayward ; he would go his own road, not caring whither it led. The thorns and brambles which beset his path were trodden down, regardless of the wounds and pains they occasioned. Every step he took was in the wrong direction, and left some foul stain upon his track, until he had trampled out every vestige of hope or expectation from his father's heart. Mr. Carlton was weighed down by a dread of some undefined and inevitable disgrace from his son. The frailties of Laurence Carlton became like a haunting presence at the Rectory, flushing his father's cheek with shame for the present, and with fear of what the future might bring.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CARLTON.

“She is a woman, good without pretence,
Bless’d with plain reason and with sober sense ;
No conquests she but o’er herself desired,
No arts essayed but not to be admired ;
So unaffected, so composed a mind,
So firm, yet soft ; so strong, yet so refined.”



THE next morning Mrs. Carlton was up with the lark, anxious to inspect her new home, and take a look at the surrounding country by daylight. “Was it much changed?” she wondered, for it was now more than twenty years since she had left Crofton.

She went into her dressing-room, threw open the window, and looked out. For some years past she had lived amid the gaities of Naples,

and the sudden change from that luxurious and enervating capital to this quiet, rural home in England, was refreshing and grateful to her. The aspect of the scenery around her was soft and tranquil in the extreme; some of the trees were laden with bloom, which covered their boughs like a drapery of snow; others were just putting forth their young green leaves, their different tints harmonizing beautifully with the pink and white blossoms, charming to the eye, and cheering to the soul.

Mrs. Carlton sat some time, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and looking out on the fair landscape before her. She had sojourned long in those Southern lands, whose balmy breezes have so often been the theme of the poet's song; but she thought she had never felt the air so soft and pure as that which now breathed upon her. In the distance, she could just distinguish the outline of the Manor House, her old home, where Edward Carlton "came a-wooing" to her, nearly five-and-twenty years ago.

Five-and-twenty years!—when looking forward they had seemed like an eternity; but looking back upon them now, they seemed no more than as many days. A mist gathered before her eyes, as they rested on the well-remembered home—her thoughts flew back, and revelled for a time in the golden hours of her youth.

It seemed strange that things should be as they were now—that Edward Carlton should be Rector of Crofton, and she the stepmother of his grown-up daughters! The reflection brought all her thoughts back to the present—she passed her hand across her brow, as though she could so sweep away the memories that were crowding her brain with pictures of former days. She wondered if any of her old acquaintances were still living at Crofton. Her girl companions, she knew, were scattered far and wide—not one remained in the old place—some were lying at rest in the churchyard. She felt grateful, and lifted her heart in thankfulness, that she had been spared to be *his* wife, his companion, his comforter in the down-

ward path of life. She was satisfied, more than satisfied, content and happy that it should be so. Falsehood and misconstruction had parted them in their youth—she felt that their union was calmer and purer now. Their old love was changed, but it was love still, devoted and now unchangeable, combining more of romance with reality than any pair of unfledged lovers can readily conceive. Indeed, Mrs. Carlton felt ashamed of the enthusiastic admiration she still retained for her husband. In the old times he had been considered one of the handsomest men of his day; though he was now near fifty, he was handsome still—at least, she thought so. His hair, once dark brown, was now iron grey; but it still clustered in thick curls above his high, intellectual forehead. It had always been difficult to determine the true colour of his eyes—some said they were grey, some blue, and some green; they might have had a tinge of all three, for certainly their colour seemed to vary with their expression. His complexion had that rich, ruddy tinge which so

often characterizes a man in the autumn of life, and stamps him, as it were, with the seal of the season. He was tall and stalwart in make, and, altogether, a fine type of strong, healthy manhood.

As for Mrs. Carlton, I should like to give my readers some notion of her, in order that they may identify her face and figure with her words and actions, as she moves through these pages. I always considered Mrs. Carlton as one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Hers was a beauty quite independent of the colouring and roundness of youth, for she was certainly over forty, and the beauty that lasts till then must be of the highest kind. Some very lovely girls are faded at five-and-twenty, because their charm has consisted only in the freshness, the tints, and colouring of youth, which soon pass away, like the summer glory of a flower. Mrs. Carlton was above the ordinary height of women, but at her age that was decidedly an advantage, for it gave a stately dignity to her graceful carriage. She had

large grey eyes, more clear and steady than sparkling; and though soft, resolute, as though she knew how to enforce her will. Her hair was long, dark, and glossy. Time had touched her lightly; the only traces he left of his progress were small bunches of silvery hair upon her temples; but they were hidden beneath her rich, luxuriant braids. There was a nameless grace about Mrs. Carlton, an inexpressible charm, which surrounded her like an aerial atmosphere; wherever she moved, she seemed to bring harmony and peace. There was something so genial in her presence, that when she was absent you missed her as you would miss warmth or sunlight. She was a good specimen of an English gentlewoman. Being easy herself, she made everybody else at ease; whatever she did, or whenever she spoke, she seemed to do, or say the right thing to the right person at the right time.

The first thing that caught her eye on entering the breakfast-room was a bunch of fresh dewy violets, lying by her plate at the head of the table.

"How lovely!—how very delicious!" she exclaimed, bending over them, and inhaling the delicate perfume.

"I am glad you like them," said Lena, coming forward from the bay-window, where, half hidden by the thick folds of the curtain, she had been sitting reading. "I got up early, and gathered them the first thing in the morning," she added; "they grow in clusters down in the hollow."

"How kind of you to think of me!" said Mrs. Carlton, bending once more over the flowers; and this time their fragrance seemed to enter her heart; then, turning to Lena, she folded her in a warm, affectionate embrace, saying—

"Dear Lena, I can hardly tell you how much pleasure this delicate attention gives me."

"I am so glad you are pleased," replied the young girl, blushing.

"It seems as though you wished to welcome me with your heart as well as with your lips," continued Mrs. Carlton, adding, after a moment's pause, caressingly: "Do you know, I almost

dreaded coming home to Crofton? It would be very painful to be disliked by my husband's children; but now that I have seen you, I am quite happy. I think we shall understand one another."

It was impossible to resist the winning grace of Mrs. Carlton's manner. Lena felt flushed and uncomfortable as she remembered the words she had spoken, and the determination she had held only yesterday. It was all changed now; she could not help it. She cast a shy glance on the serene face above her, and answered nervously—

"Yes, I think—I—I am sure we shall."

"You must not think that I have come to rob you of one atom of your father's love, Lena; his affection for me can in no wise lessen his love for you; his happiness must be our mutual care; the peace and comfort of home will rest with you now as much as ever it did."

While they were talking, Mr. Carlton and Grace came in from the garden. Grace bowed with a shy girlish air to Mrs. Carlton, and, without

approaching near enough to take her hand, or receive the kiss her stepmother was quite ready to bestow upon her, she took her accustomed seat at table.

“Why, Lena,” said Mr. Carlton, “Grace and I have been looking for you everywhere, for I saw, or thought I saw, you go into the shrubbery an hour ago.”

“So I did,” she answered. “I went down as far as the hollow to gather these violets for”—she hesitated; it was difficult at first to pronounce the name, but she did at last—“for Mrs. Carlton.”

The gratified smile that played upon her father's face more than repaid her for the trouble she had taken. Aunt Jane, as we shall call her, to save the confusion of names, breakfasted in her own room, being in rather delicate health. Mrs. Carlton at once took her place at the head of the table, as though she had been accustomed to do the honours of the house. It seemed quite natural to see her there; her bright face, and lively

way of conversing, even on the most trivial matters, diffused a cheerful spirit round her. Grace devoted herself entirely to her father. She watched to hand him his tea and toast, or anything else he wanted, seeming determined that nobody except herself should do anything for him, if she could help it.

“By-the-bye, papa,” she said, “we quite forgot to tell you that the Manor-house is let at last.”

“I’m very glad to hear it, my dear,” he answered. “Do you know who our new neighbours are to be?”

“Well, we don’t exactly know ; but they say in the village that it is a widow lady, a French Marchioness ; but we shall soon know all about her, for she takes possession to-morrow ; heaps of furniture have been sent down already.”

“I wonder if she has any daughters?” said Lena. “If she has, they will be such nice companions for us ; we could take long walks together ; it would be a good opportunity to practise our French, too.”

"I don't see that you are in want of companions," said Grace, pettishly; "you have always got me to walk with; but I dare say you'll like a change."

"I did not say they would be companions for me," replied Lena, gently—"I said *us*. We all like a little fresh society now and then, and *you* are always complaining that Crofton is so dull."

"So it is," said Grace. "I wonder if they'll give balls and parties?—if they do, I shall like them well enough. I suppose they'll bring lots of new fashions from Paris?"

"I am sure I hope not," said Mr. Carlton, "or we shall have all the village running wild again. It was quite dreadful," he added, addressing his wife, "when you ladies first took to wearing steel petticoats, to walk through the village and see the spirit of imitation among the people; at every turn you met the labourer's wives and daughters, with the hoops of butter-firkins and beer-barrels pinned under their skirts. It is curious to observe

the effect which the example of the upper classes has upon the lower; no matter whether it be in manners, morals, or in dress. I am afraid my girls are themselves too fond of show and glitter to have any wholesome effect upon their poorer neighbours. I do believe, Gracie," he added, smoothing the young girl's hair, and looking fondly on her face, "you would wear a coach and horses on your head if it was the fashion."

"So I would, papa," she answered undauntedly. "Wouldn't you, Lena?"

"Well," said Lena, half hesitating, but quite seriously, "I would if it was becoming—not else."

"A very wise reservation," rejoined Mrs. Carlton; "none but a perfectly tasteless person would ever become a blind follower of the fashion. All women like to look well, and to do that, it is necessary that each should study her own complexion and figure, and adopt that style which is most becoming to herself, without reference to fashion. I don't, however, mean to say that a woman should

dress in such a way as to become singular; I would not have her go into society with a helmet, spear, and shield, however Minerva-like or classical her style; good taste will always approach near enough to the prevailing mode to avoid singularity or remark."

"Well," said Grace, "I suppose we all have a weakness for something—at any rate, papa," she added saucily, "you have no right to lecture us, for you had a few little vanities of your own when you were a young man." She whispered something in his ear, and then leaned back and laughed merrily.

"For shame, Grace!" said her father, shaking his head with mock gravity; "it is a very unfilial act to bring your old father's follies up in judgment against him."

"Well, but it is true," she answered, laughing; "you know you were anxious to get a pair of fine dark whiskers, and *we* know what you did to get them!"

"Yes," said Lena, joining in her sister's mirth.

“Oh, fie, papa! I am sure, to look at you now, nobody would believe you had ever been guilty of such a thing! Only fancy, tying up your face and going to bed in roasted cabbage leaves!—and all for a pair of dark whiskers!”

“Which you never got,” added Grace.

“I beg your pardon, young ladies,” replied the Rector; “for the space of twelve hours I exulted in the possession of a fine pair of jet black whiskers; then they turned rusty, then grey, then all colours, like a pheasant’s tail, and I shaved them off.”

“A very proper result,” said Mrs. Carlton, “and a fitting end to vanity.”

“Ah! but I was young then, remember.”

“And we are young now, papa—please remember that!” observed Grace, exultingly.

“I must own, Edward,” said Mrs. Carlton, “the girls have got the better of you. Seriously speaking, I have no doubt that young men commit even more follies than young women, for the sake of vanity or fashion.”

"Well, well, I see I am fairly beaten out of the field," said Mr. Carlton. "Henceforth I hope I shall stand as a melancholy warning to fathers, never to confide their follies and vanities to their children. But here comes the letter-bag," he added, as the gravel crackled under the feet of the postman. Mr. Carlton stretched out his hand, took the bag in at the window, and said smiling, "I've a great mind to punish you, for so mercilessly exposing my follies, by intercepting all your correspondence for the next six months."

"If you did, we would manage to be even with you," said Grace, with a saucy laugh.

"I would trust your woman's wit for that," replied her father, as he unlocked the letter-bag, and emptied it of its contents. His eye at once lighted on one directed to himself, in a large, firm, manly hand. "Ah! here's one from Archie!" he exclaimed.

"Archie" was evidently a favourite, for Grace caught up the words and repeated them.

"From Archie! Oh! I am so glad. He

writes so seldom now, that I am sure he is trying to forget us as hard as he can."

Lena's quick eye had caught sight of Archie's handwriting before her father's did—she knew it well. Every morning, when the postman's tread was heard upon the gravel walk, her pulse quickened, and she wondered, "Was there a letter from Archie?" If there was none, her heart sank, and she felt sick with disappointment; but she never uttered her hope or her disappointment aloud, as Grace did. Now, as soon as her eye fell upon the superscription of the letter, she rose, walked to the window, and began to chirp to her goldfinch, giving him a sprig of water-cress.

Meanwhile, Mr. Carlton read his letter. Grace, with one arm flung round his neck, peeped over his shoulder, so anxious was she to learn the contents.

"Saturday!" she exclaimed, eagerly; "why, that's the day after to-morrow, papa. That is good news! Do you hear, Lena?"

Lena did hear, and came slowly towards the table, that she might hear more.

“Archie has got his captaincy,” said Grace; “and is ordered off to join his regiment on the—let me see, what does he say?—on the 15th of next month; but he will steal time to run down and pay a parting visit to dear old Crofton.”

“Archie off to the Crimea!—what do you think of that?” said Mr. Carlton.

“That he will make a brave soldier, and come back a hero,” replied Lena, while a deep flush suffused her face.

“I wonder whether he will wear his uniform down here!” exclaimed Grace. “I hope he will, for he looks so handsome in it!”

While Grace chattered on to Lena, Mr. Carlton was talking to his wife in an under-tone; no doubt he was explaining to her who Archibald Dundas was; for presently he turned to his daughters, saying—

“Now, girls, take care that Archibald has his


own room ; and mind that everything is there just as it used to be. I should like him to carry away a pleasant recollection of his old home in England. Now I am going into my study, and I daresay I shall not leave it till dinner-time ; for I have been such a run-away, that I fear I shall find my business sadly in arrear."

"I think I shall go over to the school," said Grace, languidly ; for whenever she felt disinclined to do anything, she invariably went down to the village school to hear the children read and spell, which is equivalent to doing nothing.

CHAPTER III.

THE HERO.

“When mirth shines on his face,
 ’Tis like the sunlight on an axe’s blade,
 Brightening, but softening not. For one so young,
 Ne’er saw I brow so hard, or heart so cold.”

“ELL, young ladies,” exclaimed Mrs. Carlton, as she entered the room dressed for walking, early on Saturday, the day Captain Dundas was expected, “are you inclined for a ramble over St. Anne’s Hill? It is a delicious morning, and so many years have elapsed since I left Crofton, that I long to revisit some of my old haunts once more. Come, Lena—Grace?”

“No, thank you,” replied Grace—“I hate walking. I never go out unless I have some particular object in view.”

“But I hope we shall have some particular object in view at every step we take,” said Mrs. Carlton, smiling good-humouredly. “I think it is impossible for those who have eyes to wander through our sweet green lanes, especially in spring-time, without finding something to admire—some food for thought and healthful meditation. I love to see the bright buds and unfolding leaves, which are so soon to cover the bare boughs with grace and beauty. The violet hiding under the hedge, the crimson borders of the modest little daisies, the glittering dew-drops trembling among the leaves—have they not all their charm? I think, if you understand the language of nature (and it is well worth studying), you must learn some beautiful and instructive lesson every time you look upon her face. I am a bit of a botanist myself,” she added, smiling, “so, if you will put on your hats, we will try to find something interesting to see and talk about in our ramble over the hills.”

“Oh! I shall enjoy it above all things,”

said Lena, rising with alacrity—"come, Grace."

"I don't feel inclined to go out," answered Grace, irresolutely. "I can amuse myself much better at home."

"You had better come," said Mrs. Carlton—"I am sure it would do you more good to be out this lovely morning than——"

She left her sentence unfinished—perhaps she thought it would be injudicious to say more; so she merely glanced at the book Grace held in her hand. Grace understood her meaning quite well, and her mind was made up.

"Do come," said Lena once more.

"No, thank you—I prefer reading," she answered, as she curled herself up on a corner of the sofa, dropped her head over her book, and in a second seemed buried in its contents.

Lena went up to her sister, and bending caressingly over her, whispered something softly in her ear. Grace jerked her head aside, and said impatiently—

"Let me alone—I do not interfere with you,

and I am not going to be taken out for a walk, as though I had just left the nursery."

Presently, however, when she heard Mrs. Carlton's cheerful voice and Lena's musical laugh blending together as they descended the stairs, she half repented her resolution, and wished she had been going with them. She listened to their footsteps as they crossed the garden, and let loose the house-dog, to accompany them in their ramble. She got up, and peeped through the window, saw their light dresses fluttering down the lane, and heard their voices, and the joyous bark of old Carlo, as he bounded before them.

Grace felt irritated, and threw her book upon the table; she did not in reality want to read, but she would not be compelled to go out, especially with, or by, Mrs. Carlton. She was angry, too, with Lena, for accepting the invitation of her stepmother, and leaving her at home alone. Now they were gone, she felt lonely, and tormented herself with the idea that she was already beginning to be neglected. One thought after

another crowded upon her, until she worked herself up into such a state of excitement and temper, that tears of vexation welled into her eyes. She had resolved to make a stand against Mrs. Carlton's influence, and hoped that Lena would have joined with her in a general revolt. Now she was disappointed and annoyed to find that in the short space of two days all Lena's resolutions were overcome, and, worse than all, that she even seemed to take a pleasure in trying to please this odious stepmother, whom they had both resolved to detest.

She had not been long left to herself, when Mr. Carlton came in to look for a book; he seemed surprised at seeing her there.

"Why, Grace, my gipsy! how is it you are not out this bright morning?"

"I—I have got a headache, papa, and I don't feel well; so I preferred staying at home."

What a sad habit this kind of fibbing is! yet people, sometimes even the most conscientious,

seem to fall into it naturally. Those who would be shocked at the shadow of a "white lie," will unhesitatingly put forward a headache or an attack of indigestion, as a screen for a fit of ill-humour. Alas! how often is a headache pleaded to hide a heart-ache or a temper-ache!

Mr. Carlton saw in a moment how matters stood; he could quite understand his children disliking the introduction of a new mistress into the house, and resolved to make every allowance for any little ebullition of temper that might ensue, provided it did not become too apparent, and was not carried too far.

"In time," he thought, "they will become reconciled to the change, and grateful to me for giving them such a companion as Christina will be to them; when they know her worth, they cannot fail to appreciate her."

Mr. Carlton at once accepted Grace's plea of a headache; and, drawing her affectionately towards him, said,

"I am sorry you are not well, darling; you

shall come with me into my study, and lie on the sofa—there you can rest quietly; or if you like to be useful, I will give you some letters to copy, and when we have done work, we will go down to the School. I should like to see what has been doing there during my absence.”

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Carlton and Lena proceeded on their walk happily enough. As they passed through the village, many curious faces peeped through half-open doors or windows, anxious to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Carlton, and to guess from her face, if they could, whether she was likely to be their friend or not; for the Rector's wife is generally an important person in a country village, and plays a prominent part in the lives and history of the poorer population.

Mrs. Carlton and Lena looked in at the School-house as they passed by, Mrs. Carlton being anxious to inspect the arrangements, and see how they were carried out. She considered, and rightly, too, that a great part of her duty, as the clergyman's wife, lay among the children

and the poor of the village. She found the school-mistress a comely, cheery-looking woman, and remained in conversation with her some little time, making numerous inquiries about the school and the scholars. Judging from the general character of her answers, and the few observations she volunteered on her own account, Mrs. Carlton saw that the mistress was possessed of a kindly nature, with a tolerable amount of practical common-sense; these ingredients assured Mrs. Carlton that she would be able to work well with her for the good of the children, who all looked clean, healthy, and happy.

Soon after leaving the school-house, Mrs. Carlton and Lena entered into one of those long pleasant, winding lanes which abound in the rural districts of England. They went their way with light footsteps, pausing now and then to admire the graceful young ferns and wild flowers springing up beneath the hedges. Then they stooped to gather posies of primroses and

wild violets, which Mrs. Carlton arranged and grouped together, so that each blossom not only showed its own grace of form and colour, but added by contrast to its neighbour's beauty.

"There!" she exclaimed, holding them up in the bright sunlight; "what artist could ever imitate these exquisite colours and forms of nature?"

"Perhaps no artist could quite succeed in imitating them," said Lena; "but many make the attempt, and produce most beautiful pictures notwithstanding."

"I have never seen one that has given me a grain of satisfaction; but perhaps I am rather *exigeant* in my demands on Art; I love nature so well that I cannot bear to look on a feeble representation of it—and all representations must be feeble. God painted the sky, the trees, and flowers, and how can man imitate his work?"

"What do you think of portrait-painting, then?"

said Lena; "were you ever satisfied with the likeness of a friend?"

"No—I have never seen one that gave me even an idea of my real living friend; and I never will possess the portrait of anyone I loved."

"How very strange!" exclaimed Lena, looking at Mrs. Carlton with unqualified surprise; "it seems to me that, when absence or death divides us from those we love, there must be some consolation in possessing even a rude resemblance of them. It would keep them so constantly in our mind."

"Your mind would retain them readily enough, without external aid," said Mrs. Carlton. "The forms and faces of those we have loved and lost, take their places in our memory like statues of saints in the niches of a holy temple; we visit them when we will—to us they never die. We revisit old scenes, and live over the long past pleasures of our life again. Of all our faculties, memory seems to be the most blessed and wonderful; it is like a vast storehouse, where all the

treasures of our past lives are garnered up; or a spiritual kingdom, inhabited by the shadows of departed friends, wherein no curious eyes can penetrate, nor even our best beloved gain a parting glimpse of its mysteries. I think Memory and Hope are our two most blessed companions."

"Hope is indeed a pleasant companion," said Lena; "but I think Memory is sometimes disagreeable, when it reminds us of troubles and trials we would rather forget."

"I do not think that trials should be forgotten," replied Mrs. Carlton; "by remembering a past error, we may, if we are wise, avoid the like in the future. As for those sorrows and afflictions over which we have no control, they often come to us like angels, unaware, and are sent to purify our own souls, as well as to teach us to compassionate the sorrows of our neighbours; none but those who have themselves suffered can fully comprehend the sufferings of others."

“Well, I don’t know,” replied Lena, thoughtfully; “I suppose trouble, like everything else, affects people differently. I do not know anything as yet of real worldly troubles; but I must say that those little irritating trials, which I do know, have anything but a soothing effect upon me. I daresay I am very wrong, but when I am unhappy, I feel discontented with everybody, and look upon everything with a gloomy spirit. It seems that I want all my sympathies and care for myself, and have none to spare for others.”

“I am afraid that is very commonly the case, especially with young, undisciplined spirits. But it seems to me that the trials which agitate our mental life are as necessary for its purification as are the storms and tempests which sweep through the atmosphere, to render it more clear and healthful. Depend upon it, Lena dear, affliction has its uses, though we, in our short-sighted wisdom, have not always the power to profit by it.”

They slowly sauntered homeward over the hills, chatting pleasantly as they went along. The time had passed so quickly, that, on returning through the village, they were surprised to find how late it was. They overtook Mr. Carlton, on his way to the railway-station, to meet Captain Dundas. Lena willingly accepted his invitation to accompany him; and Mrs. Carlton went on her way alone, thinking that, after all her fears, her time would pass happily with her husband's children.

In due time Mr. Carlton and Lena returned home with their visitor.

Archibald Dundas was a fine, soldier-like fellow, of about five or six and twenty; firmly, though slightly built; he had that delicately fair complexion which is considered so beautiful in a woman; but being rarely seen in a man, might perhaps be thought effeminate. No one, however, could connect the idea of effeminacy with Captain Dundas. He had light silken hair, which clung in thick curls about his high mas-

sive forehead; his features were good; his lips full, and shaded by a slight downy moustache. He had large, almond-shaped blue eyes, bright and sparkling, but clear, and cold as steel—at least, so Mrs. Carlton thought, as she spoke a few courteous words of welcome to him. They were evidently objects of curiosity to each other; whilst their brief interchange of greetings lasted, they indulged in a mutual scrutiny, before they turned away.

It needed no penetrating eye to discover that Captain Dundas was a kind of demi-god at the Rectory. Mr. Carlton loved him as a son—perhaps better than one; for his own son, as we have stated, had grieved and disappointed him, while Archibald had done neither; but Mr. Carlton forgot that where there is no control—no authority exerted—no expectation raised—there may well be no disappointment. Although Mr. Carlton had been the guardian of Archibald Dundas, yet that young gentleman had been pretty well his own master. He was free to adopt what

profession he chose ; he paid his own tailor's bills ; and his youthful follies or imprudencies never offended either Mr. Carlton's ear or eye ; Archibald took care of that. With Laurence Carlton, of course, it was different. His father wished to govern him as he governed the rest of his household ; but the boy would not be governed, and rebelled hotly against any authority which his father endeavoured to exert over him. He might have been led, perhaps ; but one man rarely knows how to lead another, especially when he fancies he has a right to command. There is a sternness in the composition of most men which cannot bend to the winning and gentle ways by which women so often gain their will. A son rarely resists the pleading eloquence of a mother's voice, which is always a welcome mediator between the sterner natures of father and son.

Mr. Carlton and Laurence never rightly understood one another ; and the brilliant, ever-active genius of Archibald Dundas came out in vivid contrast with the idle, careless nature of Laurence

Carlton. Hence his boyish follies became greatly magnified in his father's eyes. As young men, one was a promising soldier, successful in all he undertook; the other was an idle good-for-nothing, who had been placed in half-a-dozen different ways of life, but could walk straight in none. It was, perhaps, no wonder that, as Mr. Carlton glanced on the handsome, gallant young soldier, his thoughts reverted despondingly to his own son.

Mrs. Carlton saw at a glance the exact position that Archibald occupied in the family; he was evidently the spoilt darling of them all. Eyes sparkled, lips smiled, and merry voices told him how rejoiced they were to receive him again at the Rectory. He appeared to be in nowise surprised or overcome by his reception; he seemed quite accustomed to that kind of thing. The girls had a great deal of village gossip to tell him; they vied with each other as to who should give him the most unexpected bit of news. It was very pleasant to see the bright, animated faces of

the little group ; to hear the light bursts of laughter, and touches of whimsical humour that interspersed the conversation. Mrs. Carlton could only throw in a remark occasionally, for the good folk, whose sayings and doings were freely brought under discussion, were quite strangers to her. She sat there quietly looking on, and taking mental notes of the characters of the trio, as unfolded in their observations and expressions. There was an acidity in Grace's disposition which vented itself in little tart sayings, not exactly ill-natured, but certainly far from amiable. Lena's playful vivacity invested with interest the humorous sketches she gave of the "momentous events" that had happened among their neighbours since Archibald's last visit. Archibald said but little ; when he did speak, his voice, like the rich rolling tones of an organ, vibrated to the soul ; no matter how trifling the remark he made, he seemed to invest the most common subject with interest. When he became excited, which he did more than once during the conversation, his steel blue eyes

flashed, like lightning leaping through summer clouds. In spite of his erect, soldierly bearing, there was an air of refinement—almost of languor—in his manner, which in any other man would have betokened more of the fashionable gentleman than the warrior; but there was an unmistakeable something in the movement of every limb—in the turn of his head, in the tone of his voice, in the ominous gleam of his cold blue eye, which revealed the spirit of the hero, ready to leap forth like a lion when the time came for action.

Mrs. Carlton had at first, wondered at the influence he exercised in her husband's family; but before many hours had passed, she was herself attracted by his presence, and began to feel an interest in him, yet scarcely with any degree of liking.

The day wore on; they sauntered about the garden; and after dinner the young ladies, with Captain Dundas for their escort, went into the village to execute some commissions for Mr.

Carlton. It was getting dusk when they returned; they found the drawing-room deserted, and the lamps unlit. Lena complained of being tired; so Archibald wheeled an easy-chair into the bay-window, brought the chess-board, and invited her to play a game of chess. Grace went to the piano, and began running over the keys, and playing snatches of melodies, wandering from one thing to another in a wild, dreamy fashion.

The day was declining; the whole western hemisphere was as a sea of light, where streaks of orange and purple flecks melted, as if by some heavenly alchemy, into liquid gold, in which the sun sank slowly down, flushing with his departing glory the rosy, fleecy feathers of clouds that floated above, and lighting up the brows of the chess-players in the bay-window. Lena sat with one hand hovering over the chess-board, like a white bird, uncertain where to alight; the other supported her dimpled chin. An arch smile played upon her lips, and sparkled in her eyes,

as they wandered over the chess-board ; at last she made her move, and, with a merry laugh, declared “ Archie checkmated.”

He sat opposite to her, his strong classical beauty contrasting boldly with her gentle womanly grace. His eyes were fixed upon her face with an undisguised expression of intense admiration ; and when she laughingly proclaimed her victory, he seemed to awake as from a dream, and caught her hand, saying—

“ *Ma belle*, if you were my adversary, I should be content to be defeated every hour of my life.”

There was little in his words ; they were such as any man in his position might, and most likely would have spoken ; but it was the tone in which he uttered them that told his meaning ; the light that kindled in his eyes was so warm and ardent, that his gaze seemed to penetrate her soul, and weigh down her eyelids with mesmeric power. She could not meet his gaze—she felt it thrilling through every nerve. A

feeling of exquisite happiness stole over her, flushing her cheek and brow with crimson blushes, as he poured the eloquence of his soul into her ear. He drew her gradually nearer and nearer to him, till her fair head almost drooped upon his shoulder, as he told her in the softest, tenderest tones, how much he loved her—that he had loved her always. The wild melody Grace was playing added nothing to the music of his voice. Presently she stopped, and without rising from her seat, turned her head towards the window, saying—

“What are you two doing there, Lena? I am sure you can’t see to play chess now.”

“No,” Archibald hastened to reply; “she is resting on her honours—she has defeated me entirely.”

“I don’t believe it,” replied Grace, decidedly; “you will never bear defeat from man or woman either. If ever I play any game with you, I shall always make up my mind to lose.”

"You might be a winner and a loser at the same time," he answered; "that sounds paradoxical, Grace, but it is quite true, nevertheless."

"Yes, if hearts were trumps; but even then, I should be sorry to play with you, Archie—I fancy I might lose more than I should gain. Already you have won the hearts of half the old maids in the parish, and I don't believe you have given them a bit of yours in return."

"You are malicious, Gracie," he said, laughing, "and I believe you are jealous because I have never offered it to you."

"To me, indeed!" she answered with a saucy toss of the head. "I should not know what to do with it, except break it, perhaps, to save you the trouble of breaking mine, sir."

As she spoke, she rose from the piano.

"Don't rise, Grace," he said hastily; "do play those variations over again—you have improved immensely since I last heard you!"

Nobody at the Rectory ever thought of denying him anything; so Grace instantly reseated herself, and recommenced playing.

Presently the servants entered with lights and coffee. Grace played on as she had been commanded, and at last discovered that her audience had disappeared. There they were, pacing slowly up and down the terrace walk at the bottom of the garden. Lena, light, aerial, and spirit-like, with a white handkerchief thrown over her head; Archibald towering at her side, and casting an occasional shadow over her.

That night, before he slept, Mr. Carlton learnt why Archibald Dundas had paid this visit to Crofton.

CHAPTER IV.

ENGAGED.

“I here do give thee that with all my heart,
Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart
I would keep from thee.”



CAPTAIN DUNDAS took Mr. Carlton quite by surprise when he proposed for Lena; he had never suspected that anything more than brotherly and sisterly affection existed between them; but parents, fathers especially, are always more or less blind on such occasions. They stand by and see the seed sown, grown, and ripening, and when the time for the harvest has come, and love stands forth to gather its own fruit, they are amazed and wonder-stricken.

Archibald had said all he wished to say, and stood leaning against the mantel-piece, awaiting Mr. Carlton's decision. There was something uneasy and anxious in Archibald's look; although he knew he had conquered, yet he was anxious for the Rector to speak and tell him so.

Mr. Carlton leaned his head upon his hand, and remained some moments thoughtful. Archibald grew somewhat irritated at his silence; at last Mr. Carlton looked up, and said,

"I hope you have not spoken to Lena?"

"Yes, I have—to tell you the truth, Guardy," he added, "I fancied her consent of more consequence than yours. I have spoken to her this evening."

"I am sorry for it," said the Rector gravely, and a shadow crossed his face; "I think you have done wrong. You ought not to have spoken to her on such a subject, and at such a time."

"Why?" exclaimed Archie carelessly; "I

came down for that express purpose, and for no other. You must have known that we always cared for each other; and before I leave England, I wished to ascertain exactly how much she cared for me. I could not have gone away and left her free."

"You are most selfish and inconsiderate to wish to leave her bound. Remember you are about to enter on a dangerous and probably a lengthy war, from which you may never return; it is not kind to carry away with you my child's best thoughts and feelings—to leave her spirit clouded with a double amount of hopes and fears for your sake. It is not wisely done, Archie—you ought to have spoken to me first; perhaps I might have been able to reason you out of this selfish folly. Now, if I refuse my consent, Lena may think me unkind—if not cruel. I am sorry if I hurt you, Archie, but for the first time in my life I feel really angry with you."

Hurt him! Poor innocent Mr. Carlton, to

think his mild reproach could wound such an iron spirit as that before him. His tone and his looks were far more reproachful than his words; all, however, fell upon Archibald Dundas as the feathered shaft of an infant might fall upon the mailed breast of a warrior, and with about the same effect. A slight, almost imperceptible smile hovered round Archibald's mouth, as he said in his old boyish way,

"I am heartily sorry if I have vexed you, Guardy; but as you have always treated me as a son, I did not think you would refuse to receive me as one."

"Refuse to receive you!" answered the Rector—"why, my dear boy, you must know that I cannot have a shadow of objection to you individually; and when the right time comes, I shall be better pleased to have you for my son than any other. I only think you have chosen the wrong season to propose yourself. This is no time to think of love or marriage, Archie, when you have so many grave cares and duties before you."

“That is the very reason why I have spoken,” replied Archie. “The thought of Lena will brace my nerves, and make my heart strong. I shall be a better man, and a braver soldier, when I know that she is to be my reward. I shall have her sweet face always before me, stimulating my spirit, and strengthening my arm. When I think she is here, waiting and watching to catch every breath of news that is wafted over the sea, I know that I shall render my name glorious for her sake.”

“You will do all this for your country’s sake,” replied the Rector. “It is your duty to strain every nerve to defend her honour, and uphold your own.”

“Granted ; but a duty done dutifully is a different affair from a duty done *con amore*, though, so far as the country is concerned, the result may be the same. However, send for Lena, Guardy ; if she be willing to adopt your view of the matter, I shall still hold myself bound to the engagement, though she may consider herself free.”

Lena was accordingly summoned. A shy

fluttering happiness beamed on her face as she entered the room. Her first glance fell on Archibald, her next upon her father's graver face, where it remained fixed. When Mr. Carlton met his daughter's eye, so full of love and confidence, he half wished he had not sent for her, or, rather, that he had seen her alone; he felt he could have spoken to her more tenderly, or more strongly, as the case might require, than he could do in the presence of Archibald, who was himself a party so much concerned in the event. He recapitulated to her the reasons he had urged upon Archibald against their entering into any engagement until his return home from the Crimea. He said much more to her, and in a different tone than he had spoken to Archibald. Lena neither moved, nor attempted to interrupt him by a word; but as he proceeded, her eyes slowly filled, but did not overflow. He concluded by saying that he left the matter in her hands; it was for her to decide. There was a slight tremor in her voice as she answered—

“Let it be as you wish, papa. It will be all the same to us, Archie,” she added, hastily, as she saw the anger rising in his eyes—“engagement or no engagement, we shall love one another just the same. We cannot help it. I shall wait for you here as anxiously, and you will as surely come back to me.”

“You may be satisfied with such an uncertain arrangement,” he said, with the slightest touch of reproach—“I can hardly expect you to feel as strongly as I do in the matter ; but to *me* it would be far more satisfactory to have some decided understanding both with you and your father, that you will be mine whenever I return to claim you.”

“My dear Archibald,” said Mr. Carlton, “I have already promised it shall be so, provided you are both in the same mind.”

“That implies a doubt,” he answered, impatiently. “You think that one, or both of us, may change our minds ; and I am now doubly anxious that we shall be bound by an engagement that it

would be impossible to break without shame or scandal on either side."

He held Lena's hand fast as he spoke, and she said, in a low, loving whisper, intended for his ear alone—

"What can bind us more surely than we are bound already, by our own will—our own love? Let it be as papa wishes, Archie." Then, turning to her father, she added: "Decide for us, papa; I am sure we shall both agree to that which makes you the happiest."

"It is of your happiness I am thinking, darling, not of my own," said the Rector, drawing her fondly to his side; "you shall decide for yourself—I will not offer another opinion on the subject. I have already said all I have to say; but I can hardly expect you young people to agree with me, so I leave it entirely in your hands. How is it to be?"

"Well, papa," she answered, drooping her blushing face upon his shoulder, "I should like Archie to be satisfied; he is going from us to

encounter difficulties and dangers, which we know nothing of, and I think he ought to carry away as much happiness as we can give him."

The gleam of exultant pride which shot from Archibald's eye was followed by a soft, tender light, wherein pride, with love, was strangely mingled. He knew well enough what her answer would be. If he had wished it, she would have given him her life to carry away as well as her love. A shadow fell on Mr. Carlton's heart, for which he could not account. He had no reason to be sad, for he had perfect faith in Archibald's love, honour, and integrity. His affection for Lena had been no sudden passion—it was the growth of years; it had been born and nourished in the familiar intercourse of domestic life. Each knew the character of the other—there was no pet folly hidden from view—no peculiarity of temper concealed. It is true; Archibald was sometimes overbearing, headstrong, and proud—so, at least, some said; but at the Rectory they had never noticed any imperfec-

tion in him. They were accustomed to yield to him, and his frequent demands upon their patience and forbearance never struck them as anything uncommon. Lena, especially, was so used to his ways, that she would have considered no change in him a change for the better. The old adage, "Bear and forbear," had been exemplified, so far as he was concerned, in her whole life. When she was a mere child, he would call her away from her girlish amusements, to join in some rough boyish game with him; she always obeyed him, and joined in his pleasures as though she liked them. So far they were suited—she was yielding; he exacting. The Rector tried to smile as he answered—

"Well, Archie, I suppose you must have your own way. I own I do not like to part with her; but if she is to marry, and I am afraid she will not be content to live with her old father for ever, I would as soon—nay, rather, you had her than any other man; though I be-

lieve few men can be worthy of my child."

"Oh! papa," exclaimed Lena, deprecatingly, as she lifted her humid eyes to his face.

"Remember," added Mr. Carlton, "she has never heard a harsh word; and though I love you, Archie, I could never forgive the man that caused my child a moment's sorrow."

"My dear Guardy," replied Archie, with one of his peculiar, unfathomable smiles, "you forget your favourite text, 'Man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upwards.' I suppose that applies to women, too. Of this, however, you may rest assured—the sorrow that I cannot save her from, I will share with her, as I shall share this, our first, and, I hope, our last great grief—that of parting now."

"Now!" repeated Lena.

"Well, not exactly now, but on Wednesday—surely that is near enough."

"Oh! too near!" exclaimed Lena; "but you will come down once more? Papa, say he must?" she added, appealingly.

"I can say nothing in the matter—I will leave you to settle it between yourselves," said the Rector, as he left the room.

"If I come, I am afraid it will be not to stay beyond an hour or two," Archie answered, shaking his head; "though of course I shall, if possible, run down and steal another look at your dear face before I start. Duty is sometimes a hard taskmaster, Lena, especially to a poor soldier. Its lightest call must be answered—with his life, if necessary."

"Oh! yes, of course. I would not have you do anything that was not quite right for the world; only it seems so hard—when you have only just come, and we might be so happy—for you to be obliged to leave us so soon."

In vain she tried to control her voice—her lip quivered like a child's in its uncontrollable sorrow. She made no attempt either to hide her love, or conceal her sorrow. She was too innocent to do either—she did not in the least mind his knowing how much she loved him.

He drew her to his side, parted the golden hair from her forehead, and looked down upon her face with intense admiration and love; but the love of such men as Archibald Dundas differs widely from the love of women. As he gazed upon her, he was contrasting her beauty with that of others, and thinking she was the only woman he had ever seen who looked well in tears—to her they were really becoming. There were no swollen lids, no stained cheeks—she looked as fresh and lovely as a rose, from whose leaves the glittering drop has been newly shaken.

“I am as sorry to go, darling,” he said, “as you are to be left behind; but you knew, when I came down, that my stay could not exceed four days. I have gained my prize, and I shall depart in peace.”

“Do you think I am such a prize, Archie?” she said playfully. “It seems to me that I am all the gainer; I am sure, when I have time to think, I shall be afraid you will change your mind.”

"About what?—going?" he asked, quickly, as though he thought her playful words were uttered seriously. Her colour deepened. She did not like to repeat her words; she fancied he would have understood her at once, and, perhaps, hoped he would have answered her by some endearing protestations, vowing *he* could never change; but she was disappointed, and answered him with a kind of nervous hesitation—

"Oh! no—of course you must go——"

"What do you mean, then, about my changing my mind?"

She nestled closer to him, and half whispered,

"This has all happened so suddenly, Archie, that I am afraid, when you have gone, I shall wake up as from a dream, and wonder why you have chosen me."

"No need to wonder, Lena," he answered, smiling at the innocence of her remark; "look there. Where should I find a face to equal that?"

He threw one arm round her, and pointed to the looking-glass. She cast a shy glance at

the reflection of her lovely self, and for the first time in her life, rejoiced that she was beautiful, because she saw that her beauty gave him pleasure. Her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks flushed, as she said,

“Ah! but, Archie, if you love me for my looks only, I do not think your love will last long. You will soon learn to compare me with other women, and you will find how inferior I am to many.”

“I shall never compare you with any other woman; to me you will be always beyond compare. I do not mean for mere beauty, Lena—thousands of women might compete with you for that—but for a true heart and loving nature, *ma belle* stands first in all the world.”

“You make me so proud and happy, Archie,” she answered, her eyes glistening as she spoke; “I am sure you might have chosen your bride from among the most brilliant women of all the world.”

“I dislike brilliant women of the world,” said

Captain Dundas, interrupting her; "they expect too much, and give too little in return. I have lived among them, and know too much of them. Besides, not one of those brilliant women could love me, as *you* love me, darling; they would think too much of themselves, and too little of me—I could never marry a woman who thought herself my equal."

"No woman in her right senses ever could think that," replied Lena, almost indignant at the idea of any one ever supposing themselves his equal.

"But women are not always in their right senses, and there is no knowing what insane notions will sometimes arise from a woman's vanity."

The next day was Sunday. The Rector's daughters were accustomed to take classes in the Sunday-school before the service commenced; but this morning, for some unexplained reason, Grace refused to go; and as Lena made her appearance dressed for walking, Captain Dun-

das, in some surprise, inquired where she was going so early.

"Do you forget it is Sunday, Archie? You know I always go to the school."

"Surely you can stay at home for once!" he answered impatiently. "You know how short my time is, and I want to have you all to myself. I cannot bear you to be away from me for a single moment."

"And I would much rather stay with you, Archie, you know that; but I really must go with Mrs. Carlton."

"Why 'must?' Can she not go by herself, or let Grace go with her?"

"Grace will not go; and as it is Mrs. Carlton's first Sunday here, I think it would seem so unkind of us to let her go alone; besides, I am sure papa would not like it—he might think we were acting disrespectfully to him."

"Well, I suppose you must go," he answered, drumming discontentedly against the window-pane; "I daresay I am very selfish to wish you

to stay at home, but it is quite natural I should."

"Ah! yes, quite; but we cannot always have things exactly as we wish—in matters of right, we must all yield something. We do not live for our own happiness only—we must think of other people a little."

He was compelled to yield, but he did it with a very bad grace; indeed, the cloud had hardly left his brow when, two hours after, he met Lena at the school-house door, and they walked together to the church.

They had trodden the same way many times before, but it seemed new to her now—she saw all things in a new light. The sun had never shone so brightly, and the birds—those sinless Sabbath-breakers—had never sung so sweetly; their joyous song seemed to re-echo the happiness of her own spirit. She felt so proud and so happy. To be the chosen one of Archibald Dundas, was to her a high and enviable destiny; she could conceive no greater blessing than that of his love bestowed upon her.


Now and then, as they walked along, she cast an upward glance upon his face; and he, in his proud, dignified way, looked down with softening eyes on the treasure he had won with so little care or trouble; for he had never known the hopes and fears, doubts and distractions, that render love such an exciting and absorbing game. He fancied he had a right to Lena, and the man who would have put forward any pretension, either to her hand or her affections, would have had a heavy reckoning with him. Lena was too happy to talk; as they strolled quietly along, her spirit was wandering through dreamland; his thoughts, too, were busily occupied, but they were of the past; hers were of the future. More than once, even while his eyes were resting on her face, his thoughts were wandering far away. Perhaps Mrs. Carlton's presence was a bar to conversation, as she of course walked by Lena's side from the school to the church. Occasionally he cast a side-long glance at her from under his

long eye-lashes. Her face puzzled him; it had done so from the first moment their glances met, and he inwardly dreaded lest she should exert any influence over Lena; he resolved to warn her to put no faith in her father's wife, and least of all in matters where he was concerned.

CHAPTER V.

ARCHIBALD DISCUSSES KING SOLOMON.

“Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; verily all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

S Captain Dundas and Lena reached the churchyard, the Rector entered it by another gate. There was an expression of serene happiness in his face, to which it had been a stranger for many a day. He looked like a man who had fought a hard fight, and come off victorious, and so he had; but unlike the soldier, who fights for fame, glory, and honour, with the knowledge that the world's eye is on him, to watch his struggles, and record his victory, Edward Carlton had fought his battle in the silence of his own soul; he had

wrestled daily with gnawing cares and home-born troubles, of which the world knew nothing; but he had gained his harbour of rest at last. Lena, who was an enthusiastic admirer of her father, thought she had never seen him look so handsome or so happy, as when he took his wife upon his arm, and walked with her up the aisle of the church. He placed her in the Rectory pew, and then went on to the vestry to prepare for service.

Many melancholy memories were wakened in Mrs. Carlton's breast, as she took her seat in the well-remembered church at Crofton. She had been absent near five-and-twenty years, and during that time death seemed to have been busy in the neighbourhood; on every side she read the name of some dead friend or well-known neighbour. Directly opposite to her pew, on the left side of the altar, was a tablet erected to the memory of her own mother; glancing around, she read the names of many other members of her family—indeed, nearly all

the relatives she had ever known were buried there; and there, too, in time, she would herself lie down and rest. More than once during the service she found herself reading the inscriptions to the dead, instead of attending to the prayers and responses of the living. In the middle of the Litany, the church door opened softly; there was a rustling of silk, a light tread, then a lady was seen hurrying up the aisle, and the next moment she was seated in the Manor-house pew.

This young lady—indeed, she was quite a girl—who attracted general attention, was tall and slight; she walked with that peculiar airy grace with which French women seem especially gifted. Her features were regular, and her complexion a rich olive tint; her large dark eyes were slightly prominent, and fringed with long lashes; her mouth was rather wide, but no one could take exception to that, as her teeth were even and exquisitely white. Her hair was thrown back in that style which the Empress

had just brought into fashion, and which was generally, though in few instances, successfully adopted—to her it was highly becoming. She was dressed with extreme simplicity; yet, everything she wore was arranged with studied care; each fold of her dress fell in its right place—indeed, her draped figure was exquisitely airy, and might have served as a model for the most fastidious sculptor. How is it that foreigners for the most part excel us so entirely, not only in the choice of colour, but in the arrangement of dress? A French woman throws a shawl carelessly over her shoulders, and produces an effect which a London belle, though she had spent an hour at her toilette, would fail to equal.

Lena chanced to glance up at Archibald, but she met no answering look. His attention was riveted on the lovely stranger, who seemed half conscious of the scrutiny she was undergoing, and had cast her eyes down upon her book, while a bright flush slowly suffused her cheeks.

Archibald kept his gaze upon her so long, that he seemed to be taking an inventory of every feature.

At length the prayers were ended; the last note of the organ died away; Mr. Carlton stood up in the pulpit, and in his earnest, impressive voice, gave the text: "Vanity of vanity, saith the preacher, all is vanity." Captain Dundas was roused from his contemplative fit; he took his gaze from the Manor-house pew, and gave, or seemed to give, all his attention to the preacher.

Captain Dundas, like many others, had a reverential affection for King Solomon. He was one of the great heroes of religious history, who can never fail to rouse enthusiasm and satisfy philosophy.

To no other sovereign do we look back with so much affection and wonder as to that great king who has left a monument to his name that will outlast the pyramids of Egypt. No writer has left so vivid, so beautiful a record

behind him. First, we have his Song, evidently written when the freshness of youth was upon him; the beautiful imagery, the passionate enthusiasm, and the rapidity with which he is hurried on from thought to thought, and from one vivid impression to another, are all evidences of a young earnest man; while the cautious and compact style of the Proverbs, and the lessons of practical wisdom contained therein, are the result of more experience of life than falls to the young. The Song of Solomon is full of anticipations of happiness; it is all aspirations for the future; the Proverbs regard the present; and Ecclesiastes, entirely retrospective and exclusive, is occupied with the past. It is the last record of Solomon's experience; his estimate of the real value of life. It is not the impatient utterance of a young man, who feels the first bitterness of disappointment, and exaggerates its importance because of its novelty; neither is it the gloomy despondency of age, arising from thwarted ambition or long-

deferred hopes; but it is a conviction forced upon a man who has enjoyed life in its fulness, on whom all the pleasures and distinction for which men toil and crave have been poured in rich abundance. There were none so wise, none so world-famous, none so magnificent as he. What has ever equalled his ivory palaces and golden thrones, garnished with precious stones? If the more lasting productions of genius, coupled with that wisdom which is coveted more than all—the knowledge of men, and how to rule them—could make a man happy, who could be happier than he, whose presence was sought by all the kings of the earth? Yet, in spite of all, in the midst of his abounding joys, the one bitter cry goes up from his heart, “Vanity of vanity—all is vanity!” This was the text Mr. Carlton chose—always earnest, sometimes eloquent, on this occasion he was both. He spoke as though he loved his subject; he painted in such vivid colours the beauty and wisdom of Solomon, the

state of the people, and the times they lived in, that his hearers were hurried through the mist of ages, and beheld the great king in all his glory. Solomon lived and breathed before them, revealed by the power of the preacher; but still, through all his pomp and glory, there ran the wailing cry, "All is vanity!" To that one unchanging result led all his experiences; that was the end of all his journeyings in search of happiness. However different the rules—however labyrinthine the paths he pursued—all came to the one end. In the midst of mirth and gladness, glory and honour, the one unchanging thought for ever haunted him, "Vanity, vanity—all is vanity!" With touching earnestness, Mr. Carlton dwelt on this subject, and besought his hearers to hold themselves loosely from the things of this world, and habituate themselves to dwell only on those things which alone are real and everlasting.

His sermons were always effective, because he never wearied his hearers; he gave them enough,

but not too much ; he rarely occupied the pulpit more than twenty minutes ; if he could obtain the undivided attention of his congregation for that period, he was satisfied. The Church Service is in itself a long one—much too long, in the opinion of many—and “after the prayers are ended,” he used to say, “it is too much to expect attention during a lengthy discourse ; no matter how eloquent the preacher may be, the voice will, after a while, become a mere monotonous sound, and the hearers will either be lulled to sleep, or amuse themselves by thinking of other matters.”

The congregation left the church with the voice of their Rector still ringing in their ears, and the imagery he had so abundantly used, still vividly impressed upon their memory ; they gathered in little knots in the churchyard, discussing the merits of the sermon, and the Rector’s new wife. Some of the older inhabitants of Crofton lingered about the pathways, hoping to catch a glimpse, or, perhaps, exchange

a few words with Captain Dundas, whom they had known from a boy; his handsome dashing appearance had always rendered him a favourite with them. Now that he was going to the war, they felt a kind of vested interest in his doings, as though all the glory or fame that he might win must reach them there, and cast a bright reflection on their quiet homes at Crofton. When he came out of the church doors, he was received by a shower of smiles; warm words and hearty good wishes greeted him on all sides. More than one stood in the background, too shy to come forward, and yet anxious to be recognized by him. He merely nodded to some, and passed on; others he addressed by name, and inquired briefly after their families and their doings. One old woman stood direct in his way, as though resolved he should not pass her by. She had kept a general shop in the village; perhaps she reminded him of some boyish prank, when raspberry tarts and marbles were the chief objects of his life. He smiled, shook hands

with her, and, congratulating her upon her good looks, told her she was growing young again. Then he would have passed on, but she stopped him ; she had a great favour to ask him, she said—

“You remember my Joe, sir—him as used to go bird’s-nesting along o’ you, when you was both boys together? Well, sir, he’s gone and ’listed”—a tear stood in the poor soul’s dim eyes as she spoke ; “he’s a good lad, sir, though he knows nothing of the world ; and I’ve heerd the army’s a sad place, where they never say their prayers, but smoke and drink, and think nothin’ even of swearing ! If you’d only give an eye to him, Capt’n, and keep him out o’ danger, and put him for’ard a bit, you shall have a poor widder’s blessin’, though it mayn’t be worth much, to the end of your days.”

Archibald smiled, and told her she had uttered a cruel slander against the army, which, he assured her, did its devotions as well as the rest of the world ; and he promised her that he

would look after her son to the best of his power.

His words, though lightly uttered, and his cheerful smile, went like a sunbeam to the mother's heart, and she went home rejoicing that she had secured a friend and patron for her son—one who could and would help him on his way; while he in whom she trusted had probably forgotten, before five minutes had passed, that such a person as Joe Davis had ever existed. The old woman had scarcely made her last curtsy, and passed on, when Lena, who had seemed thoughtful, suddenly turned to him, and said,

“Is she not beautiful, Archie?”

“How do you mean beautiful?” he answered; “in body or in soul?”

“I do not know anything about her soul,” said Lena; “but I think she has the most charming face I have ever seen.”

Archibald had a comical twinkle in his eye, as he answered,

“At sixty-five, Lena, a woman’s beauty generally begins to fade; and I do not think poor old Kitty Davis could ever have been a beauty.”

“Nonsense!” said Lena, laughing outright; “you know I am not speaking of her. I mean that beautiful young lady who sat in the Manor House pew.”

“Ah!” he answered, half hesitating. “Well, yes, I suppose she is; but to tell you the truth, I did not take much notice of her.”

“Not take much notice!” exclaimed Lena; “why, Archie, you were looking at her during the best half of the service!”

“Was I?—very likely. But, you know, some folk look without seeing—their eyes are open, but their sense is shut. But now you recall her to me, I think I did observe the lady—her face seemed somewhat familiar to me—I am sure I must have seen her somewhere.”

“If you had ever seen her, Archie, you must have remembered her—such a face as that could not easily be forgotten.”

"I have lost my relish for all faces but one, dearest, and I am never tired of admiring that," he answered, with a loving glance.

"But you may admire others, just a little, you know; I will allow that; not too much, or I might be jealous."

"It must be something very much out of the common way to attract me. I have seen beautiful faces *usque ad nauseam*; it is rather a relief to meet with an ugly one. As a rule they are far more agreeable."

Lena made some playful rejoinder, and on they walked. Her thoughts hovered round her love, like bees about a lime-tree, gathering nothing but honied fancies and sweet imaginings. His thoughts, too, were wandering far and wide, but it is not necessary to follow them, nor to dive into his breast, and drag forth his secrets; enough of his sayings and doings will appear hereafter. Suddenly, however, he stopped and said, "Ah! I have got it now—it was at the Embassy Ball at Paris last year!"

"What was at the Embassy Ball?" said Lena, startled by his sudden exclamation.

"That I met the young lady who has just roused your admiration. I danced with her a great deal, and afterwards—" he checked himself, and, after a momentary pause, added, "She was with a stately old dowager, her mother, and, if I remember rightly, there was some scandal about the family, though I forget now what it was."

"How odd you did not recollect the face at first."

"Not at all—women look so different in their bonnets, Lena. The face certainly seemed familiar to me, and you know I have a talent for finding out likenesses, and whenever I fancy a resemblance, I never rest till I have traced it home."

If Captain Dundas had been submitted to a strict cross-examination, he certainly would have committed himself sadly, but Lena had no idea of cross-examining him at all. However, if

they had been ever so much inclined to continue their conversation, they could not have done so, for just as Archibald finished speaking, Mr. and Mrs. Carlton came up, and somehow they fell to talking of the Rector's sermon.

"By-the-bye, Guardy, I do not at all agree with you," said Archibald. "All is not vanity, and even if it were, I doubt the wisdom of propagating such a notion."

"You have no right to doubt the wisdom of the wisest king that ever existed," said the Rector.

"Admitting him, for the sake of argument, to be the wisest, yet the wisest sometimes err."

"But when such a man as Solomon speaks, and his words have been unquestioned for ages, until they have become as sacred truths, fixed in the hearts of men, it seems a little presumptuous, Archie, for you to rise up and say that they are false!"

“Not at all presumptuous,” replied Archie, “for *I reason* upon an asserted fact, before I receive it as a truth; all men do not, they do not take the liberty of thinking for themselves as I do. It is not because poor old Solomon, with his three hundred wives, managed to be miserable, and pronounced all things to be vanity, that I am to believe it. Life might be full of vanity to him, but to every man it bears a different fruit. Can the life of any good man be called a vanity? Are the flights of genius, the creations of art, the wonders of science, vanities? The genius of Shakespeare, which has given employment to thousands, and pleasure to thousands more, the marvels of electricity, the telegraph, the power of steam, to say nothing of those virtues which are exercised in the narrow circle of home—are these all vanities? If so, peace, prosperity, and happiness are maintained on earth, and even heaven itself is won by vanities!”

“You do not receive the prophet in the

proper spirit," replied Mr. Carlton. "He only reminds us, in the midst of pain or pleasure, poverty or prosperity, wisdom or power, that all alike must end; that when we have journeyed to the end of this life, we shall look back, and discover that all things belonging to this world are vanities."

"I deny it," replied Archie emphatically; "the man who looks back upon an ill-spent life, may call it 'vanity;' but he who has lived a good, useful life, happy himself, and beneficial to others, rejoices, and feels that he has not lived in vain. Of course we know that all things have an end, but that is no reason why we should not enjoy this world, without forgetting that which is to come."

"Certainly not; the prophet merely warns us not to put too much value on the things of this world. On the guiding-post to every pursuit, he is content to write this warning, 'Ye who enter here, expect not to find happiness—all alike leads to vanity and vexation of spirit.

Rest or labour, folly or wisdom, wealth or poverty, one event happeneth to all.’”

“Well, Guardy, if we were to enter into life with the conviction that, no matter how great our struggles, how earnest our endeavours, all was vanity, we should be disgusted from the first. If all the springs of life were poisoned, what matters it of which we drink? What is the use of such warnings? If the result must be the same, what matter if we reject or obey them?”

“Were the purpose of Solomon no other than to disgust men with the world—to set before them in theory that which in practice every man must experience, there would indeed be little profit in his warning. But the declaration of Solomon is worth something to thoughtful men; it warns them to be prepared for disappointments which they cannot avoid—and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. But so strangely are men constituted, that it is not only on occasions of disappointment, but often

at the moment of their greatest successes, they have felt most poignantly the truth of Solomon's words, and in their inmost hearts have taken up the burthen, 'I looked upon all things my hands had wrought, and the things I had laboured to do, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.' You are too much given to quibbling on sacred subjects, Archie; if you would reflect before you speak, I am sure you would hold different opinions."

"Speech is with me the result of reflection, Guardy; and you know you always tell me to come to you whenever a doubt arises in my mind on any religious subject. It is very singular, and I daresay you will be surprised when I tell you that, the more we talk, the more we seem to be at issue, and the more convinced I am that I am right."

"But, my dear boy, remember it is not with *me* you are at issue, but with the great King himself! Those are his words you doubt—not mine."

“Ah! well, it is much the same thing—he makes an assertion, and you bolster it up—it is your duty, of course—but even if Solomon himself were to rise from his grave, with the amiable intention of convincing me that all is vanity, I should not believe him—I should say then, as I say now, with the young German poet—

“Fast dashing torrents of life brimming over,
Say, should ye cast me away on the stream,
Still would I sing 'mid the foam of its billow,
It is not in vain, I have dreamt my life's dream.”

“Why, Edward, how fast you have been walking and talking,” said Mrs. Carlton, at that moment coming up with them, for she and Lena had been loitering behind, and allowed the two gentlemen to get far ahead. “It is very fortunate we were engrossed by our own conversation, for you have given us no chance of enjoying yours.”

“You have had no loss, my dear,” replied the Rector. “Captain Dundas has been trying

to persuade me that he is wiser than the wisest King that ever lived."

"And failed, of course," said Mrs. Carlton, drily.

CHAPTER VI.

WOMAN'S WIT.

“ I might hear you sing,
And from the well-tuned accents of your voice,
In my imagination might conceive
With what melodious harmony choirs
Of angels sing above.”



ON reaching the house, they found luncheon ready, and Grace in a demure, half mocking mood, evidently annoyed at the new position of affairs in the family, and inclined to be more facetious than was agreeable to her sister. When they strolled out into the garden, she could not resist inquiring “how the adored one had behaved in Church, and in what way he was different from his old self?” She made many observations and minor inquiries, which made Lena blush and laugh as she answered,

"What nonsense you talk, Grace! Why, of course Archie is just the same as he always was; only," she added shyly, "he loves me a little more, that is all."

"Oh!" said Grace, "I should have thought the mere fact of 'loving you a little more,' made all the difference. I suppose, then, he might as well be in love with me? and I am not quite sure he is not. You know he always gave me the preference until last night; perhaps he has made a mistake, and will explain himself by-and-bye. Heigho! I wish somebody would propose to me!" After a moment's pause, she added, "I do not think we shall get on very well with our stepmother, Lena; do you?"

"Well," replied Lena, prudently, "I really do not think we have anything to complain of at present."

"Of course not—she is only feeling her way. Papa would not let her take too many liberties at first; but, of course, I cannot expect you to feel it so much as I shall."

“Why not?”

“Because you have the prospect of being speedily freed from home trammels altogether. You can look forward to the time when you will be your own mistress, have a nice house, and, I dare say, go to balls and parties, and all kinds of pleasant places. I tell you what, Lena,” she added, brightening, “when you are married, you must coax Archibald to let me come and live with you.”

“So I will, dear,” said Lena, twining her arms round her sister’s waist; and as they paced up and down the pathway, Lena listened more patiently than usual to her sister’s half fretful reproaches and complaints. Lena felt she had grown selfish during the last few hours, for since Captain Dundas had proclaimed his love for her, she had lived in an atmosphere of new delights. The world, and everything in it, seemed to wear a changed aspect to her. The days when she and Grace used to speak of the future (when they first heard of their father’s

marriage), and speculate on their own position, on what they should do, and how they should act, under certain emergencies, seemed now to be a long way off. Mrs. Carlton had made herself such a pleasant companion, that Lena had almost forgotten the existence of a step-mother. However, in paying her the respect which was her due, and showing the tender regard she could not help feeling for her, Lena felt as though she had deserted her colours, and played half traitor to her sister ; never reflecting that it is wiser and better to adopt a new course which is right, than persevere in an old one which is wrong. Hence it was that she resolved to be doubly patient and forbearing. When Grace spoke of her being married, and her own mistress, she woke up as from a dream. The present was her world—she was enjoying all the poetry of love, and was not willing to be thrust forward into the future when the reality awaited her. She was revelling in her golden hour of romance, and shrank from con-

templating the time when romance must end, and reality begin; the prospect which Grace pointed out was too matter-of-fact to afford her any satisfaction in her present state of mind.

While Grace was still pouring her hopes, fears, and general dissatisfaction into her sister's ear, the garden gate opened, and the old sexton came hobbling along up the pathway. He pulled his forelock to the young ladies, and told them he wished to speak to the Rector on some pressing business, "as wasn't quite pleasant." The girls hurried with him to the house at once, and ushered him into their father's study. His story was soon told.

It appeared there was a family in the village named Spence. They had formerly belonged to Crofton Church, but for the last twelve or fifteen years they had joined a peculiar section of the Dissenters, and had become the devout followers of Josiah Toogood, a converted prize-fighter, whose own wonderful conversion from

wicked ways generally formed the staple of his discourses. Margaret Spence, a girl of sixteen, always in delicate health, had been seized some months previously with a contagious disease, and whilst the fever was at its height, the visits of friends and neighbours became scarce, and even Josiah Toogood was so much occupied, that he could find no time to attend to what was supposed to be the death-bed of Margaret Spence. The poor girl then expressed a wish to see Mr. Carlton, who immediately went to her, for he obeyed the will of Him who says, "Ye shall leave all the world and follow me;" and in tending the sick and sorrowing, he knew he was following Christ. He was a good soldier, and went wherever duty called him; he did his work with a brave, earnest spirit, and with double pleasure, when he was called on by the suffering poor. The poor girl soon began to look forward to his visits as to the coming of a friend. After awhile she rallied, and by her family was supposed to be recovering fast.

Josiah Toogood never forgave the Rector for having performed the duty he had himself neglected. However, Margaret Spence never regained her strength—she grew weaker and weaker, and in her last moments expressed a wish to be buried in Crofton Churchyard, and that Mr. Carlton should read the burial service over her. This, of course, he was prepared to do; but it seemed that in addition to the burial service, the family and friends of the dead girl, headed by Josiah Toogood, intended to sing a hymn, and give a discourse over her grave. This was the news that old Ben the sexton brought to the Rectory. A perplexed look stole over Mr. Carlton's face as he said—

“I suppose there is no mistake; you are sure it is so, Ben?”

“It's wuss than so, sir; they're goin' to preach an exultation over the body; and they've invited half the parish—some's comin' becoss they likes it, and some's comin' to see what the upshot'll be.”

"Very well," said Mr. Carlton, looking at his watch; "there is no time to lose."

"No, sir, but I thought you wouldn't like to be took by surprise."

"I should not, indeed," answered the Rector. "I thank you for your information, Ben. Now go to your post, do your duty, and I shall do mine."

"You won't let 'em have it their own way, sir?" said the old sexton, with a last lingering look. "I've buried a'most everybody in the town nigh on forty years, and things allus went quiet and comfortable for them as was dead as well as them as was livin'."

The Rector racked his brain, and paced the room thoughtfully for some minutes, considering his best course of action. One thing was certain, the Spences must not have their way—that was impossible. They had their own grounds on the outskirts of the town, where they might lay their dead to rest in their own fashion; but the Church of England had laid

down its own laws, and it was the duty of all clergymen to see that those laws were not infringed. There was no time to use persuasive arguments or diplomatic skill in the matter. Immediately after the afternoon service, the bell would begin to toll and the funeral procession be on its way to church, and Mr. Carlton had an ugly vision of the scene which would in all probability ensue; whichever way it ended, the event could not fail to bring scandal on the Church.

"Let them have it their own way," said Lena.

"That they shall not," replied the Rector, decidedly. "I will sooner have the grave filled in, and the procession turned from the church gates."

"Something must be done to prevent matters coming to such a crisis," said Mrs. Carlton, her clear womanly wit coming to her aid. "Do they live far off?"

"About a mile. Why?"

"I could walk there in a quarter of an hour," she said, rising briskly.

"You!—my dear Christina, what can you possibly do in the matter?" said the Rector, astonished at her proposal. "You have no power—no authority over them."

"All the better—I have a greater chance of success. If you were to go, armed with your clerical authority—with the Rubric in your hand, and the Canon Law thundering from the tip of your tongue—you would do no good, but most likely rouse an antagonistical feeling; they would not listen to reason, especially to *your* reasoning. I know the dogged obstinacy of these people well. Some scandalous scene would ensue, damaging alike to you, to them, and to the Church. However the matter might end, some shame would cling to both parties; and the honour of the Church and of her ministers ought not to be assailed—it should be kept pure and undefiled."

"The fault would be entirely their own," said the Rector.

“Yes,” replied his wife, “but the greater part of the shame would cling to you. The report would go abroad that you, a Christian minister, refused burial to a Dissenter! Think of that! The world is too busy to inquire into the details; it would be content with the fact—not one in a thousand would know the actual truth that surrounded it. But if I hope to do any good, I must not lose time. Good-bye.”

Mr. Carlton, of course, cautioned her to be careful in all she said or did; he had great faith in her judgment and clear-sightedness, for he knew she would say the right thing in the right place. She hastily put on a plain dark dress, and threw a black veil over her bonnet, to make herself “look as much like mourning as possible,” then went away hopefully, leaving them behind her wondering and mystified as to her intended proceedings.

“I pity the poor people,” said the Rector, musing; “it is not their fault, but the fault of their leaders, the would-be Christian guides, who

stir up their bad passions, and lead, or rather mislead, them into all kinds of errors."

"But, papa, it is quite right that the minister should lead his flock."

"Yes, if he leads them in the right direction; but I cannot help thinking that a sect which permits any unlearned and unauthorized individual, be he a reformed drunkard or converted prize-fighter, to thunder from their pulpits, must have more black sheep than good shepherds among their number. I am sure of one thing—they give the Church of England more trouble than the whole community of Rome put together."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Carlton was hastening to Richard Spence's cottage—a servant walked with her to show her the way. As soon as she got within sight of the cottage, she dismissed her guide, and went on alone.

It must be confessed, Mrs. Carlton felt a little nervous and anxious as to the success of her mission; but she kept a good heart, and

hoped for the best. As she approached the cottage, she observed that everything surrounding it was neat and orderly; a few flowers were in the windows, and sweet-smelling climbing plants were trained round the lattice-work of the doorway. The door was partly open, and she saw dark figures moving about within. On seeing her approach, or rather, on hearing her footsteps on the gravel outside, the door was opened wider, and a tall gaunt man, with a rugged, grief-stricken face, looked at her with inquiring impatience. She spoke at once—

“This, I think, is Mr. Spence’s cottage?”

He nodded, and fearing some interruption from those within the room, she added, in a low voice,

“I wish to speak to you for a few minutes.”

“You must wait till to-morrow, then,” he answered, curtly—“my daughter lies dead yonder.”

He would have closed the door upon her,

but she glided past him into the house, saying,

“I know it, and it is for that reason I have come.”

As she crossed the threshold, she found the room filled with friends and neighbours, who had been invited to follow the remains of the young girl to the grave. A hasty glance convinced her that the mother was not among them, and she passed on to the kitchen, which lay to her left. Richard Spence followed her, amazed, it must be confessed, at the liberty she had taken in entering his cottage at such a time without any visible reason, and yet not liking to interrupt her. Mrs. Carlton's object was to speak privately with the wife, or the wife and husband together; it would have been of no use at all to speak to either in presence of their friends. As Mrs. Carlton passed through the room, and merely glanced round it, she fancied she discovered Josiah Toogood among them; he, of course, would be sure to oppose her.

On a low stool by the kitchen fire sat one real sorrow-stricken mourner, the mother of the dead; her face was buried in her hands, and she rocked herself to and fro, sobbing piteously, unconscious that a stranger's eye was on her. Her husband's attention was apparently drawn away from Mrs. Carlton for the moment, as he laid his broad brown hand upon the poor woman's shoulder, saying—

“Come, mother, bear up—all the cryin' and moanin' in the world 'won't bring her back. I wish it would, though I know she's a sight better off where she is—we all on us feels that.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Carlton, stooping over the bereaved mother, and taking one coarse hand kindly within her own, “she is indeed better off; but you must not think you have quite lost her—though you cannot see her, she can see you, and perhaps is even now watching you, grieving because you grieve—longing to

speaking words of comfort, to dry your tears, and bid you grieve for her no more."

"Thank'ee for them words, ma'am," said the father, his face brightening up. "Maybe, as you say, she can see us now; an' if she can, why, it's a'most as good as bein' alive again—'tain't like bein' dead at all."

"Ah! but we can't see *her*, father," sobbed the poor woman, in uncontrollable grief, "nor we shan't see her never no more—never no more!"

"Well, well, bear up—come, wife, come—if you want to see the last on her; we're nigh startin'."

Now was the time to speak.

"Stay!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlton—"I dare say you wonder why I am here, and, indeed, I feel that I am intruding on your sorrow—but I must first tell you I am Mrs. Carlton."

"Oh!" growled Mr. Spence, looking suspiciously at her from beneath his bushy brows—"the parson's wife down yonder?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Carlton, feeling the sooner she came to the point the better it would be, "and my husband has desired me to assure you of his deep sympathy. He visited your daughter, I believe, during her sickness, for he has often spoken of her sufferings, her patience, and her goodness."

"Ay, so she wur," said the father, drawing the back of his hand across his eyes; "she wur as patient as a lamb, and never a better nor more dutifuller child in all the parish."

"My husband will read the burial-service over her, according to her last wish, poor child; but he has heard—I do not know whether his information is correct—that you intend to sing a hymn over her grave."

"That wur her last wish, too, and we means to do it," answered Spence, with dogged resolution.

"It cannot be done," said Mrs. Carlton, gently, but decisively. "We only heard of this half an hour ago, and I came at once, to use reason

and persuasive arguments against such a proceeding, which cannot fail to bring scandal on both churches, also to save you from breaking the law."

"Beg your pardon," he answered surlily; "singin' hymns ain't breakin' no law—and we're a-goin' to do it—there!" he added triumphantly. "We knowed all along the parson 'ud be agin us; but so long as we don't interfere wi' him, he's got no right to interfere wi' us."

"But he has a right to interfere in this matter——"

"Don't see it—and if I'd know'd you'd been the parson's wife you shouldn't have come in at all. It isn't Christian-like for a lady like you to be harrying poor folks in their trouble. Come along, mother, they're a-waitin' for us." There was something almost majestic in the man, as he strode past Mrs. Carlton towards the door; then he paused, and said, "You want to hinder us from singin' and from speakin', too; I suppose you say it ain't lawful!—but what's

lawful for one, is lawful for another. Why shouldn't there be a speech made over her when she's buried, as well as over the great folks as are buried in St. Paul's or in the Abbey there in Lunnon? They talk fine talk over them—half lies, I'll be bound; but nobody," he added, his anger succumbing to his grief, "nobody can't say nothin' good of my poor gal that lays there as wasn't true—she wur too good for us, she wur—that's why God took her."

"We are quite willing to say and to hear all that can be said in her praise," said Mrs. Carlton, "for we know she deserved it; but it must be said at the proper time and proper place—it must not be allowed to interrupt the solemn service which the Church has ordered for the dead. As for the orations you speak of, they are the echo of the nation's voice, the nation's tribute in honour of her great men, and are only permitted to be uttered over public men. To your child we would give a tribute from our hearts, not to the few who could gather round

her grave to listen, but in the parish church, where all the town, from far or near, may hear it. My husband will preach a funeral sermon on Sunday next, and tell how much her friends regret and grieve for her. This may do good to the living, as well as honour to the dead; her bright example, illustrated by my husband's eloquence, may win many followers."

Richard Spence was evidently touched and gratified by Mrs. Carlton's words; he liked to hear her speak so kindly of his darling dead. He was half won over, but he steeled his heart, and obstinately determined not to give way, so he answered gruffly—

"It won't do no good preachin' about my gal there—we shan't be there to hear it—we don't belong to your church."

"But we all belong to one God, and however we may differ here, we all hope to be united hereafter—at any rate, at the grave all dissension should cease. When the dead rest, the living should be at peace. You have been ill-

advised. If you persevere in your intention, you will create a disturbance, and destroy the solemnity of your daughter's grave. You have no more right to break the law of the Church than the law of the land."

Mrs. Carlton had already convinced him that he was wrong, but he would not own it—he felt his courage fast oozing away, but with dogged obstinacy he went towards the door, dragging his wife after him. A happy thought struck Mrs. Carlton—

"Stay!" she exclaimed; "one moment more. You have been a soldier, and a brave one, I have heard."

"So I have," said the old man, proudly; "and if it weren't for the loss of this limb," and he showed the stump of his arm, "I'd be a soldier still."

"Then you know what discipline is?"

"Should think I did—rather."

"Suppose your captain gave you an order, and you disobeyed it?"

"I'd be shot, and sarve me right; but I don't see what that has got to do wi' my child."

"My husband stands in the place of a soldier," said Mrs. Carlton; "the Church, his captain, issues certain orders, which he is bound to obey. There is one settled ceremony for the burial of the dead, which admits of no alteration or addition; were Mr. Carlton to permit you to carry out your intention, he would be guilty of disobedience to the laws of the Church."

Mrs. Carlton's voice, beseeching, yet convincing, had a wonderful effect on Richard Spence, who all his life had been accustomed to military obedience. He was struck by her argument. She had put it exactly in the form which he could best understand. He held out his large brown hand to her, saying,

"You're right, ma'am, I see—I understands you now, and I axes your pardon, if I was a bit rude just now. I'll speak to the minister, and we'll give it up."

"But she wished it," faltered the mother, looking imploringly in her husband's face—"with her last breath she asked us to sing 'Emmanuel's Land' over her; she sang it like an angel herself when she was alive."

"We will sing it here over all that remains of her," said Mrs. Carlton's silvery voice—"here, under your own roof, where she has lived and died. Come, if you will allow me, I will join you."

As Richard Spence had said, their friends had got on their hoods and scarfs, and were waiting for the chief mourners to take their places, previous to starting for the church. The whole assembly were evidently impatient at the long delay, and were curious to know who was the stranger, and why she had detained them at such an unseasonable time. They cast a scrutinizing glance upon her as she followed the sorrowing parents into the room. Spence, in a straightforward, soldierly fashion, spoke out to the minister—

"I've been put in mind, sir, as singin' ain't quite the thing in Crofton churchyard; so, if it's all the same to you, and nobody's got no objection, we'll have the hymn sung here afore we start."

The old soldier's word was law in his own household; everybody knew that; even Josiah Toogood made but a faint attempt to cling to the first resolution.

The father placed himself at the head of the coffin; the mother crouched down by his side, her forehead resting upon the coffin, and grasping his large hand, as though it could support her in this heavy hour of trial; their friends gathered round them, and their minister, with half-closed eyes, and a professional drawl, led off the hymn, his flock following him. Before they had reached the end of the first verse, they became aware that a sweeter sound than their own untuned vocalization filled the room; slowly their voices dropped lower and lower, till one by one they ceased altogether,

and simultaneously they turned their eyes to where Mrs. Carlton stood in shadow, at the far end of the room. It was from her lips the sound proceeded. At first her tones had crept in low, and half unnoticed, among their harsh tuneless voices; but as the hymn proceeded, her rich voice swelled with its grand solemn burthen in such a volume of melodious sounds, that it was no wonder all sank into silence beneath its wonderful entrancing power. One moment it rose with a burst of enthusiasm, as though ushering the spirit of the dead girl into the presence of angels; then, in slow solemn cadences, it came back to earth again, and sank like a moaning sigh into the hearts of all present. The men listened with bated breath, and some of the women, deeply affected, sobbed aloud.

No prayer, nor pious exhortation poured forth on this solemn occasion, could have touched their hearts as did this magic music of the human voice. While the last cadence of the

hymn still lingered in their ears, Mrs. Carlton dropped her veil over her face, and was gone from among them.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF TO THE WAR.

"*Cleopatra.* . . . Your honour calls you hence,
And all the gods go with you! upon your sword
Sit laureled Victory, and smooth success
Be strewed before your feet."

"*Antony.* . . . Let us go. Come :
Our separation so abides, and flies,
That thou, residing here, go'st yet with me,
And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee."



ON Wednesday morning early—indeed, before daybreak—Captain Dundas was up, and out on the top of St. Anne's Hill, to watch the sun rise. It was his last morning at Crofton; it might be many a long day, or year, before he would stand on the same spot, and see the same sight again. In a few days he would be on the wide sea, his back turned

on the old familiar home, and his face towards a new land, wherein lay the honour, fame, and glory he hoped to win. The same sun would shine for him there, but on scenes how opposite, how varied, and how different !

He knew he should tread strange ways, behold new faces, witness solemn scenes and awful catastrophes, before he should again stand on that quiet hill at Crofton. Many a man would have sighed at leaving peace, tranquillity, and love behind him ; but not so Archibald Dundas. Ambition said, " Go forward !" and he was content, nay, eager to be gone. He knew that his love would remain in her father's home, watching and waiting for his return. He sauntered slowly towards the Rectory, half expecting that Lena would be out to meet him. She knew that he intended to go and see the sunrise ; she had promised to be up early too, and walk with him to a favourite brook, that ran through the meadows, about a mile and a half through the village, where the forget-me-not grew in such

rich profusion as to give its name to the little stream. It was for the purpose of gathering some of these sentimental flowers that they were to make their loving pilgrimage that morning.

He passed many a labourer going cheerfully to his daily toil; herdsmen were driving their cattle through the meadows; and the rosy milkmaids, with their clattering pails, laughed and chatted merrily as they tripped along. The sheep, just loosed from the fold, were scattered over the fields, nibbling the fresh dewy grass with evident enjoyment—but no Lena appeared. He wondered why she did not come, and, by the time he reached the Rectory, had worked himself up into a state of irritable impatience. He pulled out his meerschauum, lighted it, and was in process of being rapidly soothed by its sedative effect, when the house began to be astir. His eye naturally turned to Lena's room; the blinds were drawn up; a dainty hand appeared at the casement,

and hung out a canary in the early sunshine; the pretty creature, which was one of his gifts, straightway carolled forth its thanks, and made the air ring with its merry trills and quavers. Captain Dundas wandered up and down the path, watching, as well as he could by occasional glimpses, the progress of the young girl's toilette, as she flitted about the room, ministering to her own loveliness, that it might gladden his eyes. He saw her shake down her hair, and brush out the long tresses which fell in silken waves about her face and shoulders. He thought how lovely she looked, and wished she would always wear it so, instead of carrying it off her face, and fastening it up behind. He remembered how often, when she was a child, he had gathered the whole mass in his hands, and let it fall on her shoulders like a shower of gold. He pondered on the absurdity of women in following the fashion, instead of adhering to the form that suited best the contour and expression of their face; and determined that his

wife should be the exception, and wear her hair as best became her. From the dressing of the hair, he wandered to a thousand other whims of his, which Lena should conform to. He was to be pleased, and his pleasure should be her law. In the enjoyment of his imaginary autocracy, he forgot to look at Lena's window, and was only startled from his reverie by her footsteps on the gravel walk; as he turned to meet her, he shook the ashes from his pipe, and replaced it in his pocket.

"Fie for shame!" exclaimed Lena, playfully. "I see what you are doing; putting your vice in your pocket, instead of throwing it away."

"It is all by way of military practice, Lena. If I cannot stand smoke, how can I ever hope to stand fire?"

"Never at a loss for an excuse, Archie; but you know you promised long ago to give up that odious habit; yet here you are, puffing away like a smoky chimney, almost before my face!"

"But with this difference—I can be cured, and a smoky chimney can't."

"And I suppose I am to have the pleasant task of curing you?"

"If you will undertake it."

"But does it never strike you that I may possibly have enough to do with my own vices?" she asked.

"Well," he answered, with mock gravity, "I dare say you have. A woman, they say, has as many vices as an unbroken filly, and as many tricks as a monkey. Doubtless you have got a few locked up in some secret drawer in your work-box."

"True, but it might give you some trouble to find the key, and I would advise you, Archie, to pause before you seek for it. Remember Pandora's box; if she had kept all the evil locked up, what a wonderfully good world this would be."

"So good," he answered, "as to be good for nothing. A spice of wickedness adds greatly

to the flavour of this world's feast, Lena."

"I am afraid it is too highly flavoured for general enjoyment," she replied.

"That is quite a matter of opinion," said Archibald; "for my part, I have seen people cultivated to the highest pitch of morality and religious propriety, and invariably I have hated them. But come, you have lectured me enough, let us end with a kiss of peace."

"No, sir," she answered, laughing, "not till you are thoroughly purified. I have a great mind," she added archly, as they left the garden, and turned up a shady lane, "to make you walk six feet behind me."

"Then, indeed, my pet vice would go before me, and I should follow it like a shadow; but suppose we effect a compromise, and I yield up one vice to another. There! you may throw it in the river if you like."

As he spoke, he placed his meerschaum in her hand. She looked at it, thought it a nasty, soiled, dirty-looking thing, and very disagreeable

to smell; but she made no remark on it to him, she only looked into his face, and said,

“Do you really care much for smoking, Archie?”

“Why, yes, I really do, perhaps because I have always been accustomed to it; I suppose it is a bad habit, though, like many other bad habits, it's very agreeable; but if it is unpleasant to you, darling, I will try and leave it off.”

“Not for the world! The idea of giving up anything you enjoyed to please *me*! I am afraid, Archie, even if you had a vice, and loved it, I should let you keep it.”

“You have been well trained in the true art of ruling, *ma belle*,” he said, looking fondly on her sweet face. “When a woman is willing to yield, she is pretty sure of getting her own way in the end.”

“But I hope my way will always be yours, Archie,” she answered, “for I always fancy that whatever you do must be right; even if I

thought you were wrong, I am afraid I should not have courage to scold you." She paused a moment, and her smile died away, as she added regretfully—"Ah! but it must be a long time before I have an opportunity of trying. Is it really true that you must go to-night?"

"I must indeed, love. I wish the evil hour could be delayed, but even if it were, our parting would be as painful to-morrow as to-day."

"You look on all things with a philosophical eye; I cannot. Only think what happiness a day may give us. If you could only stay, think how many more looks, and words, and pleasant memories I should have to treasure up when you are gone?"

"The longer I stay the more loth I shall be to go," he answered. "If anything disagreeable is to happen, I like to take the bull by the horns, face it at once, and have it over. If a cloud is hovering over me, I would rather it burst at once."

"There is the difference between you and me. I would rather keep it off as long as I could. Remember the passage in Hood's 'Oddities,' where he says that some people go to meet trouble halfway, whereas, if they would stay within doors, and look another way, sorrow might forget to call on them."

"That is a different matter; he speaks of ills that are uncertain, I of those that are inevitable, as inevitable as is my departure to-night."

"I wish I could forget it," said Lena, with a sigh. "The idea of your going seems to throw a cloud over everything to-day."

"I will show you a way to make it bright, to me, if not to yourself. Let this day of the week be consecrated to me, dearest; think of me, write to me, play over my favourite airs, do all the things I love best, and even, if you can, make a pilgrimage to the very brook where we are going now."

"I will! I will!" said Lena, catching eagerly

at the idea. "That is a good thought of yours, Archie. I shall be the happiest pilgrim in the world."

They were emerging from the shadow of over-arching trees into the broad, bright sunshine, and, as the light fell on Lena's upturned face, no more charming picture of youthful loveliness could have been found. A rosy flush was on her cheeks—partly the effect of exercise, partly arising from the enthusiastic spirit within her. Her eyes, always beautiful, were now radiant with the light of love and the glory of youth. Her face had something of that rapt, holy expression with which some young saints are pictured; a love half human, half divine, lighting up every feature, as though it were the offering of the soul's adoration at some favourite shrine; but Lena's god, Lena's idol, was no invisible saint; he was by her side, showering down upon her the incense of the passionate love awakened by her spiritualized beauty.

Once more the old story, old as the hills,

and yet for ever new, was told; and the old scene from life's drama was rehearsed.

All around them was fair and beautiful—joy might have painted the scene, and angels written the programme. Love, Hope, and Youth played each a part. Will they weary of the business, and yield to other less accomplished actors?—or will they play on through all the varying changes and shifting scenes of life, until the curtain falls, the lights die out, and Time's unerring hand gathers up the faded flowers and broken faith, and over the ashes of human love scatters the waters of oblivion.

The two paced on, uttering fond follies and passionate protestations, such as we all have heard or uttered in our early days, and which were sweeter to our ears then than all the eloquence and wisdom of the world have been since; yet we are half ashamed to look back to them, when time has steadied our wit and sobered our judgment. I do not know why it should be so, for the spring of life is like the

season of spring; according to its geniality or gloom, and upon its showers and sunshine, depend the blossoms of summer, the mellow fruits of autumn; but we English are a race of practical people, who too often, as soon as we are past the flush of youth, ignore the memory of the passion and poetry which helped to make it joyous.

Archibald and Lena strolled on, and when words were wanting, looks answered looks; their eyes were more eloquent than words, for they spoke the unutterable thoughts of the soul.

They reached the brook at last; the "forget-me-nots" were abundant, and covered the water with an azure dotted carpet. Archibald declared he would not pluck even one; they must all be gathered by her hand, or he should not value them. After some light laughter and merry badinage, he threw himself upon the bank, and watched her as she went gaily about her task, warbling snatches of songs, and now and then pelting him with wild flowers. At last she de-

clared she was tired; she came and sat down by him, with her lap full of the tiny blue-eyed flowers, and began to arrange them. This was soon done; but then she had nothing to tie them up with. Archibald suggested that a tress of her own hair, tied in a true lover's knot, would be a very appropriate finish to the bouquet.

"You can't have it, Archie, for even if I were inclined to part with a lock, I have got nothing to cut it with."

"But I have," he answered, drawing from his pocket a little morocco-case, a gentleman's pocket-companion, containing scissors, tweezers, corkscrew, and sundry other useful articles. "You see, I am provided for all emergencies," he added, smiling, and without more ado he took off her hat.

"Well, I suppose you must have it," she said, shaking down her bright hair; "but the particular lock must be of my own selection, or I shall have my head disfigured for the next six months."

"Don't talk of being disfigured, darling," he said; "only think of what the next six months may do for me! I can hardly expect to pass unscathed through this terrible war; and, after all, I may return to you but a poor, maimed, broken-down soldier."

Of the possibility of not returning at all, Archibald never thought. A shade of sadness crossed Lena's face, while he continued—

"And perhaps you will change your mind, and refuse to be my wife after all?"

"Well, perhaps I may," she answered, shaking off the cloud, and trying to speak as lightly as he did. "A woman has always a right to change her mind, you know, and I don't know whether damaged goods ought to be available in the matrimonial market."

"But damaged in the service of your country, Lena—surely some allowance ought to be made for that?"

"Oh! of course; and in such cases the country makes a liberal allowance, I believe?"

“*Very*,” he answered, with a wry face.

“You cannot expect the ladies to be equally liberal; but I am afraid, in a legal point of view, I should still be liable. You only promised me a hand and a heart, and if you bring those back from the war, I fear I shall look over all other defects, and take you—unless, indeed, you grow unbearably conceited, for the loss of a limb is sometimes the boast and glory of a man’s life, you know.”

Thus they chattered on, half in jest, and half in earnest, until the hair was tastefully arranged in a true lover’s knot, and fastened with a long blade of grass; then Captain Dundas proposed that they should walk on to St. Anne’s Hill. Lena cast a rueful glance towards the hill, which was very steep, and full half a mile from where they sat. She was not accustomed to any greater exertion before breakfast than a saunter through their own grounds; she felt tired, and by no means inclined for any more walking.

“Well,” she said, half hesitating, “perhaps we had better not go on any farther, Archie, or we shall be late for breakfast.”

“Oh! they won’t wait,” he answered, carelessly; “they know we are out for a stroll, and can’t be timed to a minute. Come along. You are not tired, are you?”

“Oh! no,” she answered, rising, and trying to look brave and strong.

“Well, then, do come,” he said, leading her in the direction of the hill.

At first she had a great mind to tell him that she really did feel too tired to go any further; but then she thought it was selfish to refuse to go with him, when it was evident he so much wished she should; so she yielded her inclination to his, and cheerfully strolled on by his side. When they reached the brow of the hill, she felt amply repaid for her exertion. The country for miles round lay before them, in a beautiful panoramic view; the river wound like a thread of shining silver through

the meadows, and the clusters of fir-trees in the distance made a beautiful background to the prospect. They sat down to rest themselves before returning homewards, and looked upon the varied scenery, enjoying the fresh, invigorating breeze.

“How often you have come and gone from Crofton, Archie!” said Lena, after a long pause, “and yet I have never felt our parting as I feel it now.”

“No wonder, dearest; of course our positions are changed since we have acknowledged we love one another.”

“But I have loved you ever since I can remember. I always associated you with everything that was heroic, brave, and good. You would be astonished,” she added, smiling, “if you knew the awful dangers you have overcome, and the beautiful princesses you have freed from imaginary enchantment, in my mind; you were the hero of every fairy tale I read, and now you are going to be a hero in reality.”

"I hope so," he answered, quietly.

"But I must have no rival, Archie," she added, playfully; "you may love honour and glory much, but you must love Lena more, for I expect you to love me always, and for ever."

"Ay, dearest, for ever and for ever," he answered, with more fervour and tenderness than usual in his tone. They sat a long time there on the hill; they knew they should have few opportunities for indulging in a *tête-à-tête* during the rest of the day.

When they returned to the Rectory, breakfast had been over some time. The Rector was occupied with parish business; Mrs. Carlton was busy with her household; and Grace was sitting with her apron full of gay-coloured worsted, which she was endeavouring to assort into something like order.

"Why, Lena, how pale you look!" exclaimed Captain Dundas, as Lena, thoroughly exhausted, threw off her hat, and sank down in the nearest

seat. "My darling, you are over-tired, I am afraid you have walked too far; and it was all my doing—you only went to please me!"

"Oh! no, it is not the length of the walk, Archie dear," she answered; "I certainly do feel tired, but you know I never walk much before breakfast, and it is now nearly eleven o'clock."

"Then I daresay you are hungry; you have fasted too long," he said; "you will be better when you have eaten something. Do, Grace, be quick, and let us have some breakfast."

"You ought to be a Turk," said Grace, rising, however, to do his bidding; "you issue your orders with so much authority."

Lena did not recover herself for some time; she felt languid and tired, and had a headache nearly all day. Mr. Carlton observed it when he came in, and rated Captain Dundas for allowing her to overtask her strength.

"It was all my fault, papa," said Lena, coming to the rescue; "I wished to go, and I so

enjoyed my walk, that I quite forgot we had to come back again."

There was a great deal to be done on this, the last day that Captain Dundas could spend at Crofton. There were many visits in the neighbourhood which he felt in courtesy bound to pay, before he left the country to begin his career on the field of battle; he had only been in the village four or five days, and these he had naturally devoted as much as possible to Lena, and left all matters of business or duty until the last day. Accordingly, he went out at mid-day to make a round of visits, and did not return to the Rectory until late in the evening, long after the family dinner was over; but that did not matter, he said, he had dined at an inn.

"And I have brought back a little souvenir for you," he whispered, drawing Lena to the window. "I could not get exactly what I wanted, for these country jewellers have but a scanty, ill-assorted stock, but I have done the

best I could." Saying this he drew from his pocket a little box wrapped in tissue paper; this he carefully opened, and took from it an elegant bracelet, of two golden serpents coiling one around another, with emerald and diamond eyes.

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Lena, "and how kind of you, dear Archie, in the midst of all your hurry and bustle, to think of me!"

"Kind!" he repeated, looking on her beaming face, and baring her arm that he might fit on the trinket. "My darling, to have such a privilege as this is worth fifty bracelets."

He lingered lovingly over his task, and more than once pressed his lips to the soft round arm, before he succeeded in fastening the clasp, as he did which, she felt a slight prick, as though the point of a pin had entered her arm.

The tea was brought in almost directly; and the lamps lighted. Lena, anxious to show her

lover's gift, that it might be admired by the rest of the family, at once went forward to the table, held out her arm, and showed the jewels sparkling in the light. Mr. and Mrs. Carlton praised the elegance of the present, and complimented Captain Dundas on his taste in choosing it. Grace, having observed it closely, exclaimed,

“What an odd, and rather unpleasant idea!”

“What is an unpleasant idea?” inquired Archibald, sharply.

“That of twining a pair of nasty serpents round a lady's wrist,” she answered, saucily; “it is suggestive, Mr. Archibald, to say the least of it; and look,” she exclaimed, catching hold of her sister's hand, and pointing to a single drop of blood on her arm, “it has wounded her already!”

Her exclamation of course drew all eyes to the bracelet, and the arm she held full in the light. Lena coloured with vexation as she heard her sister's inconsiderate remark. Mr.

Carlton rebuked Grace sharply; Mrs. Carlton looked vexed and said nothing. But Archibald's eyes darkened and flashed, as he exclaimed authoritatively,

"Give it me back, Lena, give it me back. I will grind it to powder beneath my feet! I little thought," he added, more gently, "that my parting gift would give you pain."

"Oh! it is nothing—nothing," answered Lena, interrupting him eagerly, "a mere scratch, it is all right now!"

She wiped the single drop of blood from her arm, and held it out to him as fair and stainless as ever.

"I was not thinking of that," he said, "though I am grieved that my awkwardness should have given you a moment's pain. I was thinking of your ill-nature," he added, addressing Grace, "it reminds me that there is often more poison in an ill-regulated tongue than in the fangs of fifty such harmless snakes as mine."

"Of course that elegant simile applies to me," answered Grace.

"And you deserve it," said Mr. Carlton, with unusual gravity. "If you wished to give your sister pain, you might have spared her for this night, at least."

"I am sure I meant no harm, papa. I did not think I should offend anybody. I was only in jest."

"Such jests had better remain unspoken."

"Archie has got so dreadfully tetchy lately," murmured Grace, half inclined to cry. "If I had called Lena a serpent, or a tiger either, she would not have minded it the least; but if I have wounded Mr. Archie's sensibilities, I'm sure I beg his pardon."

"Say no more about it, Grace," answered Archie, "I daresay you spoke unthinkingly, and, after all, it does not much matter; Lena does not take it to heart. You must be punished though, Grace; suppose we banish you to the piano for the rest of the evening?"

"You let her off too easily, Archie," said Mr. Carlton, and was doubly attentive to him, evidently wishing to make up for his daughter's folly.

After a little general conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Carlton retired to the library; Grace obeyed orders, and played till she was tired, then sat down and fidgeted with her netting till bed-time; Archibald and Lena managed to amuse themselves without extraneous assistance. They were to retire to rest early, as the mail-train, by which Captain Dundas returned to London, passed through Bradbrook (which was three miles distant) at five in the morning. Before they separated for the night, Mr. Carlton called Captain Dundas into his study, to say a few words to him before they parted. Lena waited in the drawing-room, wondering what her father could have to say, and trusting it was nothing that could ruffle her lover's temper; she knew that slight things had power to vex him. She was greatly relieved when,

after half an hour's absence, he returned, and answered her inquiries smilingly.

"Your father has been giving me a lecture, dearest, that would not have disgraced the greatest moralist living; he was so eloquent, so wise, and—may I say it, love?"

"Say anything."

"So tedious then, that henceforth I shall associate him in my mind with Dry-as-dust."

"Then it must be diamond dust," said Lena. "He loves us so much that he is perhaps over-anxious for our welfare. He would wish you to be the best, bravest, and noblest man in all the world."

"The essence of all virtues, dearest, concentrated in the spirit of his own son-in-law."

There was something in his tone which jarred upon Lena's ear; she looked quickly into his face, and said anxiously,

"I don't know how far you are in earnest, Archie; surely you cannot blame papa for loving his child too much?"

“Not for loving *you* too much, but for trusting *me* too little. I do believe your excellent stepmother has been putting in a word against me. Instinctively I hate that woman, Lena. But don't let us waste time talking of her; this is the last hour we may spend together for many months, perhaps years. I don't know how it is, but I feel more sad at parting with you than I believed I should. I am half afraid that some envious cloud will rise up and snatch you from me.”

He drew her tenderly to his side; she gazed upon him with perfect love and trust, and answered,

“It must snatch me to another world, then, for in this I am yours only.”

The next half hour passed quickly—too quickly for them both, as they sat talking over their hopes, fears, and wishes for the future. The lamps burnt dimly, and were almost out, when Mr. Carlton put his head in at the door, saying,

"Come, my child, I have given you time enough to say 'good night,' you must go to bed now."

"In five minutes, papa——"

"And then you would want five more, and five more still, until the night was worn away. No, my child, to bed this minute!—the sooner such partings as yours are over, the better. Say good night, and part at once."

"I shall see you in the morning, Archie?" said Lena, looking inquiringly in her lover's face.

"I think not," he answered; "I ought to be some miles on my journey before you will be out of bed."

One long look, a lingering kiss and pressure of the hand, and they had parted.

"At what hour did you say I was to start, Guardy?" asked Captain Dundas, as he took his candlestick.

"I have ordered the chaise round at four o'clock. The mail-train passes through Brad-

brook at five—you will just be in time to catch it. Good night, my dear boy, and God bless you!”

The two men shook hands warmly, and parted.

During the night, a brisk wind sprang up, and increased till it became almost a storm. It went shrieking and howling round the house, and moaning mournfully down the chimneys, rising into a wild wail, like a spirit in trouble. When the wind partially died away, the rain began to fall, and pattered against the windows in a melancholy measure. Lena was restless, she could not sleep; she got up, wrapped a shawl round her shoulders, and sat shivering, counting the time as the quarters struck from the old church tower, and looking out upon the clouded sky. Presently the moon shone out from among the dark masses of broken cloud, which drifted slowly from before its face, and left it unobscured and bright. She heard the clock strike the half hour past three; then she un-

fastened the door, and descended noiselessly to the breakfast-room, where coffee had been ordered for Captain Dundas previous to his departure. But Lena resolved that his last meal at the Rectory should not be a cheerless, comfortless repast, attended only by a drowsy, unwilling maid-servant, with no one to bid him God bless him as he left the threshold. She had the fire and the lamps lighted, the hearth swept, and the breakfast prepared in as neat and orderly a fashion as it would have been if the whole family had been expected to assemble.

In due time Captain Dundas came down, dressed for his journey, expecting to swallow a hasty cup of coffee, and be gone. Great was his surprise at the cheerful aspect of the room. There was the bright fire crackling in the grate, the steaming coffee, crisp toast, and new laid eggs on the table; and, above all, Lena smiling a welcome to him.

“My dearest Lena!” he exclaimed, “I did

not expect such a treat as this—it is the most agreeable surprise I have had in all my life!”

“You have no right to be surprised, Archie,” said Lena; “you know well enough that I would sit up all night only to hear the last echo of your footstep, or catch the last glimpse of your shadow. But you do not know half of what you owe me yet—I have made the toast and boiled the eggs myself! Sarah seemed so stupid and sleepy, that as soon as she had lighted the fire, I sent her back to bed; and do you know, Archie, dear, I have been thinking how happy in some respects poor people must be; they depend so entirely on each other for all their comforts; they do everything for one another; and I should like to do everything for you, work for you, cook for you, and attend to you myself.”

“You may one day have a chance of exercising your domestic talents for my benefit, dearest; for after we are married, I shall al-

ways strive to take my little wife everywhere with me."

"Will you, indeed?" said Lena, brightening at the thought; "that will be delightful! I always envy the Countess Brenhilda, when I read of her going to war with her husband. I am sure, if you were in danger, I should be as brave as any man!"

"You small fragile thing!" he answered, caressing her as he would a loving child; "the first sound of the trumpet would scare away your wits."

All the while that they were talking, Lena was ministering to his creature comforts, filling his cup and replenishing his plate till he had made a substantial meal. She had made up her mind to part with him without a tear, if possible, though she knew it would be a hard struggle; for more than once, even while she was speaking, and trying to be cheerful, she had some difficulty in keeping back the rising tears.

Presently they heard the chaise drive over the rough stones of the stable-yard, and roll rapidly round to the Rectory gate. Captain Dundas sprang up, and clasped her in his arms, whispering, amidst a shower of kisses,

“No tears, dearest; don’t send me away down-hearted. Let our last glance be sunshine, our last words hopeful and strong. Let me hear you bid God speed me, with a brave strong spirit, such as becomes a soldier’s wife.”

“I will,” she answered enthusiastically, looking up in his face. “God bless and speed you, my own heart’s love!” A moment’s sacred silence, and then she added, “You will write to me often? Remember, I shall live upon your letters, and I shall watch, you do not know how anxiously, for every scrap of news that comes to England. You will take care of yourself, Archie, for my sake?”

“Such care as a good soldier may, dearest,” he answered, with his peculiar smile.

"Ah! I know what that means!" and though her voice had a touch of sorrow in it, her eye dwelt proudly on her lover's face. He answered both the look and the words, saying,

"It means, dearest, that wherever there is greatest danger, there I shall be. With God's will, the first post of peril shall be always mine; the rest we must leave to Providence."

"We shall be late, sir, I'm afraid," said the groom, at the door; "it's as much as we shall do to catch the train, drive as hard as we may."

One more hasty embrace, and Captain Dundas hurried out to the gate, sprang into the chaise, and was driven rapidly off.

Lena stood in the doorway, and followed him out into the cold damp twilight, with her spirit's eye, until the sound of the wheels had died in the distance. Then, and not till then, she became conscious that the morning air had chilled her to the heart; she closed the door, and returned pale and shivering to her bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

“ His heart was formed for softness, warped to wrong,
Betrayed too early, and beguiled too long ;
His early dreams of good outstripped the truth,
And troubled manhood followed baffled youth ;
With thought of years in phantom chase misspent,
And wasted powers, for better purpose lent.”



WHEN Mrs. Carlton had been at the Rectory but two or three weeks, Lena had discovered that there were some few things in the world of which she was entirely ignorant ; had become unconsciously in the habit of adopting her stepmother's opinions, paying respect to her wishes, and, indeed, seeking every possible opportunity of pleasing her. One morning she said to her sister,

"Do you know, Grace, I think we will ask Mrs. Carlton to choose some nice books for us to read; not amusing ones, of course, those we can choose for ourselves, but something instructive and improving."

"I don't want to be improved," interrupted Grace, pettishly, "and if I did, she is the last person I should apply to for advice, or anything else; I hate her. But I see how it is, Lena, she has changed you, as she has changed everything else in the house but me. I do believe you love her better than you love me!"

"How could I ever love her better than I love you, Gracie?" said Lena. "But I own I do not dislike her as I thought I should. Somehow or other, I do like to hear her pleasant voice, and to see her moving about the house; she puts me in mind of a piece of living music. It's no use denying it, Grace dear, she has brought a new life into the house, and I am sure we shall be happier if

we do not struggle against her. Of course I had rather papa had never married, but, as he *has* married, I don't think he could have chosen a better person; she is certainly very kind to us."

"Kind!" repeated Grace. "Yes, I never expected she would beat us, or act in any other outrageous way. After robbing us of our father, she could not very well turn us out of doors. As to her kindness, it's all a show—she is full of patronizing airs and graces. I had rather she would throw off the mask, and say at once she hates us!"

"Hates us! Oh! Grace, how can you talk so? See how beautifully she behaved about mamma's jewels; many women might have considered them theirs by right, and might have been generous enough to give us some few trifles—but the first thing she did was to divide them equally between us, and she spoke so kindly and affectionately, that, for my part, I have liked her better ever since. Indeed, she

seems to consider our feelings in every way," continued Lena, warming in defence of their stepmother. "Only last night, when your head ached, no one could have been more tender and kind than she was; she bathed your temples, made you comfortable on the sofa, and would not read aloud lest it should disturb you. It was not exactly what she did, but her way of doing it, that I felt; and *you* were not over-gracious either, for even papa noticed it, and said as much when you were gone to bed."

"There! I thought so," exclaimed Grace, with a sudden outburst of anger. "So she talks of me behind my back! She marshals her virtues side by side with my vices, and overwhelms me with her odious attentions, to show papa what an exemplary wife he has got, and what an ungrateful daughter! You have quite opened my eyes, Lena—now I quite understand the game she is playing!"

Lena saw it was no use arguing with Grace in her present mood; she was determined to

look on all Mrs. Carlton's actions through the distorted medium of her own imagination. Her spirit was in a continual state of rebellion, and her manner was in consequence irritable and peevish. She had resolved to dislike her step-mother for no other cause than that she was her father's wife; and Grace was one of those unhappy people who, having once avowed a determination, cling to it with all the force of a weak and obstinate nature. She would not acknowledge herself wrong, and made herself really as unhappy as she imagined herself to be. She shut her heart against Lena; somehow or other, whenever the sisters were alone together, Mrs. Carlton's name was sure to be mentioned, either directly or indirectly; it always roused a sneer, or some ill-natured remark from one, and a warm defence from the other; at last Lena felt it necessary to avoid the subject. Thus their intercourse became restrained, and a sort of estrangement grew up between them.

Grace fancied she obtained no sympathy at home, so she sought it abroad, and found many people ready to sympathise and condole with her, on her self-created troubles. It seemed so natural for a stepmother to behave ill to her husband's daughters, that few people thought of suggesting that possibly the fault might not be all on one side. Thanks to her step-daughter Grace, Mrs. Carlton's sayings and doings were discussed, commented upon, and carried from house to house; the poor lady would have been greatly astonished if she had heard them, and certainly would have failed to recognize herself, as she was reflected in the minds of her neighbours.

Things were in this state when Laurence Carlton came home. On his arrival at the Rectory, he was closeted with his father for nearly two hours before he made his appearance among the rest of the family. At first the voices of father and son were loud and angry; by degrees they became more subdued; but

there had been much exciting talk between them; and when Laurence came forth from his father's study, there was a fierce flush upon his face; his lips were compressed as though he had much ado to control his wrath. He paused a moment to recover himself before he went into the drawing-room, where his sisters were eagerly awaiting him. He was certainly a handsome young man, so far as fine eyes and correct features constitute beauty; but his face wanted a certain refined expression. He was three or four-and-twenty, but looked older; he was pale and worn, as though he had outrun his youth, and lived past all youthful feelings. Grace rushed to him as he entered the room.

"Oh! Laurie, dear, I am so glad you have come home!" she exclaimed, embracing him with a vehemence that drew from him a half serious, half laughing remonstrance—

"There, that will do! Why, Grace, I never had such a bear's hug in all my life! You will kill me with kindness, and no mistake!"

“A timely warning for me,” said Lena, laughing. “Never fear, you shall not have *too* warm a reception from me—there’s just the tip of my finger, and I won’t even give you a kiss—you may come and take one!”

“That’s a fair challenge!” exclaimed Grace, half bitterly; “with a little practice, I believe you would be a first-rate coquette, Lena.”

“Why, Grace, what’s the matter?” said her brother, turning from Lena to her, “there’s a cloud upon your brow as though it was going to rain tears!”

He was right, there was a cloud upon her brow; she was hurt at his reception of her affectionate greeting. She had looked forward with over-much longing to his coming home; the more she had estranged herself from Lena and the rest of the family, the more her thoughts had clung to Laurence. He should be her confidant; she would tell him all her troubles—he would be sure to sympathise with her; so she thought, and expected him all the

more eagerly. But his first words had chilled her. At any other time she would perhaps have made a laughing rejoinder, but now she could not speak. Laurence put his arm round her waist, drew her to him, and kissed her in his old way, saying,

“Why, Gracie, how cool you are—not a bit like my merry, bright-eyed little sister! What’s the matter, eh? Has the ogress eaten up your gay spirits?” he added, significantly.

“Hush! here she comes!” said Lena, as a rustle of silk was heard in the passage; and the next moment Mrs. Carlton entered the room.

“I am afraid you will think I am very slow to welcome you, Laurence,” she said, cordially extending her hand to him, “but the fact is, I have been working in the garden, and your father has only just told me of your arrival.”

“I dare say,” said Laurence, “he would rather have communicated the pleasing fact that I was a thousand miles off; though I have re-

turned like the Prodigal Son of old, I have not met with the prodigal's reception."

"No, indeed," replied Mrs. Carlton, smiling; "we shall sacrifice no fatted calf in honour of your return; we must reserve our rejoicings until we reap the first fruits of your repentance."

"They will never ripen without sunshine, and I am afraid the ruling atmosphere of this house is one of clouds and storms."

"Never fear but we shall be able to extract some gleams of sunshine," said Mrs. Carlton; adding, with a sweet smile, "at any rate, so long as you remain here, I hope you will be as happy as a son ought to be in his father's house—I shall do all in my power to make home really home."

"I am sure *you* will," replied Laurence, who seemed to feel the unaffected kindness of her manner, as he lounged into a chair opposite her; "but I am afraid I shall be more plague than profit even to you."

"Well, I shall be content to bear the plague, if the profit will revert to you."

"Query that last," he said; "I fear I am an unprofitable subject altogether—but I say," he added, "do you know how long my father means to keep me here?"

"No," answered Mrs. Carlton, surprised at such an inquiry, as he had only just come home; "but I suppose until your father can find some suitable employment for you."

"It will be a long time, then," he said, "for we don't exactly agree as to the meaning of the word 'suitable;' I wish he would let me choose for myself."

"No doubt he would, if you were to explain your views to him."

"Well," answered Laurence, deliberately, "that would be a rather difficult matter, for I have not exactly got any views on the subject. I have only a general notion of the sort of thing I should like."

"The fact is, Laurie," said Grace, "you

would like to live a roving, vagabond life; you had always a turn that way. You know, when you were quite a boy, you ran away, intending to go to sea—indeed, I believe you had found a ship, but you thought better of it, and came home again.”

An expression of half regret, and half anger, crossed Laurence’s face as he replied—

“Yes—I came home again, not because I changed my mind, or repented of my choice, but because I—” he paused a second, and then half shaded his face, as he continued, “if I had gone then, it would have broken my mother’s heart; she was in bad health, and I was afraid I might never see her alive again—that was why I came back.”

Mrs. Carlton felt her interest in the young man greatly increased; she saw that, beneath that general reckless, *blasé* exterior, there was a heart; the next consideration would be how to reach it.

Laurence thrust his hands into his pockets,

l lounged back in his chair, and added, addressing Mrs. Carlton,

“What Grace says is quite true. I had at one time quite a mania for the sea; I could turn my thoughts to nothing else. If I had not been thwarted then, I should not have been such a scapegrace as I am now—but it’s all my father’s fault.”

“Oh! Laurie,” said Lena, with the slightest touch of gentle reproach in her tone, “I am sure papa meant everything for the best. He wanted you to maintain an honourable position in the world, and he put you in the way to get it.”

“Some folk have decidedly narrow notions of an ‘honourable position,’ ” replied Laurence. “My father thought it was only to be won at the bar, or in the pulpit; and,” he added, making a wry face, “I had no call to either. I give my father credit for good intentions, Lena—I dare say he meant to do right, but he set the wrong way about it, that’s all.”

“We can none of us do more than mean to do right,” said Mrs. Carlton, gently; “and even if our intents miscarry, I don’t think we should be held responsible, at any rate not condemned. We may sow the seed, but we cannot tell if it will bear good fruit. Parents have a very serious duty to perform; it is the place of every father to guide and direct his sons in the choice of a profession, and sometimes to choose for them, when they are too young or too thoughtless to choose for themselves; and considering that we so often mistake ourselves, and apply ourselves to courses for which we are totally unfitted, it is no wonder if we sometimes make the same mistake with regard to others.”

“It seems to me that life is full of mistakes altogether,” said Laurence. “Nothing seems to be in the right place, and everybody seems to stand in everybody else’s way. If I had made the world, I would have made it different.”

“You would have filled it with dogs, guns, and horses, Laurie,” said Grace, archly.

"Or have brought out an improved edition of human nature," observed Lena, "corrected and amended by the 'Life of Laurence Carlton!'"

"Rather presumptuous, is it not," said Mrs. Carlton, "to speak of improving God's works? He made all things perfect."

"Except man," interrupted Laurence. "He left him in a confoundedly imperfect state."

"He left to man himself the noble task of self-improvement."

"Yes," replied Laurence, "but that noble task is sometimes a very difficult one, and we don't always know how to set about it. However, if I were that way inclined, I should have plenty of time for self-improvement here at Crofton. I suppose it was a special act of Providence that sent me here; though what you mean to do with me I can't think, and I'm sure I don't know what to do with myself. My natural inclination will decidedly be in favour of suicide."

There was something in Laurence's tone and manner that surprised, yet interested Mrs. Carlton painfully. It was evident that his energies had all run to waste; he had lived an idle, profligate, useless life; he had been so often told he was good-for-nothing, that he was content to believe it, and never tried to become better. He had been thwarted in the first eager desire of his youth, and because he could not obtain what he most wished for, like a spoilt child he threw away the good that was within his reach. He had evidently been mismanaged altogether; had been driven where he should have been led. There was no harmonious feeling between father and son; perhaps it was the father's fault. Though men are generally tender and loving to their daughters, they are too often harsh and exacting towards their sons, visiting slight sins with heavy punishment; they seem to fancy that masculine humanity must be coerced into good conduct, and, insisting that strict measures are necessary

in the training of boys, often enforce their wishes, not only with hard words, but with blows, forgetting that every stroke upon the body falls also upon the spirit, bruising and injuring both. Some symptoms of such too common treatment struck Mrs. Carlton in her first interview with her husband's son. One thing was very evident, if Laurence had disappointed his father, he had also disappointed himself; she could see he was far from happy. She determined to look with an indulgent eye on Laurence, with all his faults. She had caught the expression of his face, during his brief reference to his mother, and augured well from it.

"He has a heart," she thought, "and I must find my way to it."

Grace seized the first opportunity of carrying Laurence off into the garden, where she could pour out her thoughts uninterruptedly.

Laurence was quite amazed to hear such an unfavourable account of their stepmother.

“You surprise me, Gracie,” he said; “she seemed rather a decent sort of woman, I thought; her manner was so kind that she took me in completely. But that’s the way with you women, if we were to judge of you by your faces, you would all be angels, and—but there, I won’t say any uncivil things on my first day at home. I can see how the land lies with *you*, poor little Gracie!” he added caressingly; “but how do she and Lena get on—they seemed to be very good friends?”

“Yes,” replied Grace, bitterly; “she was determined to have one ally in the house, and Lena took to her from the first—she consults her, takes her advice, and copies her in everything. Oh! it’s mean and contemptible, the way she truckles to her; but I never will—never! She may make my life miserable—she does that now; but she can’t compel me to alter my old ways, or to give her a kind word, or to seem gracious to her! I never do—I won’t, for I hate her, and I want her to know it!”

“Why, what a virago you are, Grace!” said her brother, laughing at her vehemence; “to measure you by the length of your tongue, I should say that you were a match for the most evil-minded stepmother that ever lived. How has she managed to get so deeply into your black books?”

“By doing everything in her power to make my life miserable.”

“Everything! but tell me one thing? She must be an arch-hypocrite; to judge by the look of her, I never should have thought there was a system of persecution going on—I wonder my father allows it!”

“How oddly you talk, Laurie!” said Grace, with a puzzled look at her brother; “of course she does nothing very dreadful—indeed, it would be difficult to find fault with her in any one particular thing. All she does seems to be proper and right—I only know that somehow, since she has been here, nobody seems to love me as they did before. She has set papa

against me by some vile underhanded means, I am sure of that; and as for Lena, she is quite changed—I am never happy at home now. Sometimes I think I will come to live with you in London.”

“Come and live with me!” repeated Laurence; “for heaven’s sake don’t think of such a thing—it would be impossible—you little know the kind of life I lead!”

His thoughts seemed to turn from her petty cares to his own troubles; after a slight pause, he added, with some vehemence,

“You talk of being wretched, Grace—what must I be? Remember, I have returned home a disgraced and dishonoured man—disgraced and dishonoured far beyond your understanding. My father knows a little—not much; and God forbid he should know more! He looks upon me already with coolness and distrust; we had words this morning, his eye reproached me more bitterly than his tongue; you should have seen and heard him, Grace, as he lectured me an

hour ago ; and the worst of it is, I feel I deserve it all !”

“Never mind, Laurie,” said Grace, laying her hand affectionately on his shoulder ; “it must be some comfort to know that you have only got what you deserve. Look how *I* am punished !”


“You ?” exclaimed Laurence.

“Yes ; what have I done to deserve a step-mother ? And yet I have got one !”

CHAPTER IX.

ADRIENNE.

“ Oh ! think what deep wrongs must have blotted out
First love, then reverence, in a child’s prone mind,
Till it thus vanquish shame and fear !”

HREE Sundays had now passed since Captain Dundas had left Crofton, and three times also the same bright vision of beauty had appeared in the Manor-house pew. Excepting these apparitions, neither she nor any other member of the family had been seen abroad. What manner of people were they?—where did they come from?—and what were they good for? These and similar questions were put one to another by the good people of Crofton, and answered with a shrug, or some

suggestive gesture. A hundred rumours were afloat respecting them; but none to the credit of the inhabitants of the Manor-house. Some reported that it was a private mad-house, and that they had heard the shrieks of the lunatics; others said that it was a retreat for Josiah Jebb's amiable criminals, who were too delicate to bear the discipline of prison life; while not a few maintained that it was nothing more nor less than an Agapemone, where young Protestant English girls were taken in, and prepared for celestial joys by being taught to despise all terrestrial happiness.

Nothing, however, did the people of the Manor-house hear of these reports and town-talk; how should they, when they held no communication with any one? Their out-of-door business was chiefly transacted by a foreign man-servant, who understood the English vernacular only just sufficient to trade in sumptuary articles. When he did comprehend a prying question, he had discretion enough to

return an evasive answer, or to put, in reply, a question of his own, directing attention to something quite opposite to what was required to be told, and thus *jeter de la poudre aux yeux* of the inquirer, as he was wont to say. Then there was no gaining admittance into the interior of the mansion, for the gate was guarded by the French Cerberus who catered for the family; and when he was not at hand, no ingress could be obtained on any consideration. All this of course added to the mystery connected with the establishment, and to the desire to penetrate the secrets of the prison-house.

Mrs. Carlton, of course, could not help hearing the scandalous and absurd tales afloat, but she gave no more heed to them than to the bark and yelp of a village cur, or the hissing of the geese in the town fields. She felt, as the Rector's wife, that it would be only an act of politeness, even if it were not her duty, to call and leave her card upon the lady

of the mansion. She thought it improper to allow a family of strangers to settle in her husband's parish, without a word of welcome or a friendly offer of assistance and good offices. Besides this, she felt deeply interested in the beautiful young face which had appeared like a mysterious vision at church, and for a time diverted her thoughts from more serious subjects. She fancied herself a reader of character, and that in each feature of the face she could read the temper, spirit, and specialities of the person she looked at—but this girl's face puzzled her; its ever-varying expression baffled every attempt to arrive at a definite conclusion.

“If I could but speak to her,” she said to Mr. Carlton, “I am sure I could win her. There is something in her restless eye that tells me she wants to repose upon the heart of some trustworthy friend; her mouth bespeaks indecision and vacillation; and yet her chin shows self-reliance and indomitable courage. I will

therefore call at the Manor-house, if only for that girl's sake."

Mr. Carlton was averse from her making any attempt to force an acquaintance, as he firmly believed that the new comers wished to remain in perfect seclusion; but Mrs. Carlton insisted that it was her place to make the first advance.

"Very well, my dear," said the Rector, "do as you please; but, remember, mine is a very Protestant parish, and uneducated people are apt to look with a jealous eye upon Roman Catholics and foreigners. Should any intimacy spring up between the inhabitants of the Manor-house and the Rectory, I do not know where it will end; difficulties are sure to arise, and troubles come upon us wholesale."

"What nonsense, Edward! Why should you suppose they are Catholics? You surely do not believe the parish clerk's tittle-tattle—the fellow is a perfect walking nuisance; he fancies, because he is the town-crier, that he ought to be

the tale-bearer and trumpeter of the village. How can they be Romanists, when one of the family has already appeared four times at the parish church ; which is a grave offence in the Church of Rome, and can only be wiped out by absolution ? But even if they do profess an unpopular creed, why should they be avoided ? Are the English cut when they reside in France, or hunted down because they are Protestants ? Protestant I am, as you know, to the back bone, but nothing shall induce me to be illiberal. The very essence of Protestantism is liberality. These people, I think, are greatly to be pitied—they might as well, indeed better, live in a wilderness, than among a population of uneducated Christians. But you cannot really wish me to avoid them because they are Roman Catholics and foreigners ?”

“I do not wish you to avoid them,” said the Rector ; “I would only have you be on your guard against the prejudices of my parishioners. Those who are not Dissenters are very low-

church men. Did I ever tell you how they served me once?"

"No, my love, so tell me now," said Mrs. Carlton.

"Well, you must know that my excellent friend, Colonel Goodlake, bought, during the French Revolution, a most exquisite painting of the Crucifix, supposed to be the work of Correggio, and he bequeathed it to the church of Crofton, where he had sat and heard the word of God preached for forty years. This wonderful painting I naturally placed over the altarpiece, believing that it would be a pleasant surprise to the congregation. I never dreamed that such a painting could give offence to anybody, but I was wrong, for nearly every person left the church immediately they saw the picture, and I preached to empty benches. The next morning, 'No Popery!' was chalked on the church doors, and I received a 'Round-robin,' couched in bitter and offensive language, condemning poor Colonel Goodlake, and abus-

ing me for Popery, and for Roman Catholic tendencies. Nor could I get a single person to enter the church until I had removed the offensive painting. Since that time I have had sad up-hill work. Every attempt I made to improve the performance of the service has been regarded with suspicion, and called Popery."

"But you have it all your own way now, papa," said Grace.

"Not quite, though I use subtle diplomacy to obtain it. I could not, until I experienced it, have believed that any reasoning people could have an objection to painting and music, both of which, to my mind, are great aids to devotional feelings."

"Is there not some danger of their occupying the mind too much?" inquired Mrs. Carlton. "While the eye and the ear have so much to gratify them, it is possible that the spirit of devotion may be lost in the glare of art. People listen to the ravishing strains of

melody, and become wrapt in the folds of the painter's genius, instead of being subdued by the gentle and unobtrusive voice of religion."

"I think not," replied the Rector. "Are we not told that in Heaven there is unceasing song? Whenever I see a man moved by music, I know he has a heart that can conceive no great wrong, and that it is prepared to receive the seeds of purity and truth. I have seen a man, seemingly without religion, an Atheist according to the world's judgment, yet so affected by the solemnity of our Cathedral service as to sob aloud; and I was once present at one of our great choral festivals when a man, who had never in his remembrance entered a church, fainted dead away at one of Handel's majestic choruses, and I heard that from that day forth he became a thoughtful and religious man."

This style of conversation continued for a long time, branching off into various topics, as was the Rector's mode when he wanted to

shelve a subject; but Mrs. Carlton had the knack of always bringing it back to the starting point, and gaining the winning-post in a gentle canter. So it was in this instance, he not only yielded to his wife's reasoning, but even gave permission to his daughters to accompany her on her visit to the maligned family. As soon as luncheon was over they started, and in less than a quarter of an hour they stood at the gate of the bespattered Manor House.

"How lonely and dismal it looks!" whispered Lena, glancing up the avenue.

"It has evidently been a long time untenanted," said Mrs. Carlton. "The whole place, the palings, the gates, indeed, everything outside bear the marks of neglect. In my girlhood I used to think it a perfect paradise—but then it was my home, where I was born and bred, where some of my happiest days were spent."

"Ah, that makes all the difference," answered Grace, with an air of resignation. "At one time, I used to think the Rectory a paradise;

but my idea of a paradise is quite different now ; there was no——”

“Stepmother there,” said Mrs. Carlton, smiling; “but never mind, Grace, it may be your fate one day to fill that unenviable position.”

“I? Oh! no,” said Grace. “*I* would never tread in another woman’s shoes!”

Before she had time to say more, the gate was partially opened, and the tall gaunt manservant, of whom I have already spoken, blocked up the narrow passage. The man’s face was a study. Gustave Doré might have used it as a model for his Don Quixote with advantage. It was long, thin, and careworn, the eye sunken, and the brow above it a perfect forest of bristles, more like the back a hedge-hog than anything mortal. The whole face, close-shaven, looked as if carved out of wood. Patience and endurance were its characteristics. It never could have smiled, even in its cradle.

To Mrs. Carlton’s inquiry whether Madame de Fontaine was at home, he curtly answered, in

broken English, "Madame, she see no stranger."

"I hope she will make an exception in my favour; if you will be good enough to carry in my card to her."

He twirled the card suspiciously between his fingers.

"I vray glad, madame—mean sorry—but me dar not. Madame shall be vray vexed."

"No, she will not," said Mrs. Carlton. "Take her my card, and I will hold you blameless. So I pray you go."

There was such a sweetness and dignity in her voice and look, that the man was unable to refuse, though he complied half hesitatingly. In a few minutes he returned, saying,

"Miladi shall receive you. Come here—s'il vous plait, madame."

They followed him through the large lofty hall, with its oaken floor and stained-glass windows, and were ushered at once into the presence of the lady of the mansion. There was nothing light, graceful, or luxurious surround-

ing her, either in the shape of ornaments or furniture. Heavy crimson curtains shaded a deep bay-window; an old-fashioned mirror, with massive carved oaken frame, was over the fireplace; there were high, stiff-backed chairs and upright sofas, covered with Utrecht velvet, which all lovers of comfort would scrupulously avoid; and on the walls were quaint old engravings, but all of religious—most of them painfully religious subjects.

At the further end of the room sat Madame de Fontaine, a woman advanced in years. The most noticeable points about her were black, intense, restless eyes, and an appearance of ascetic severity, in her marked features, her frigid manner, and even in the tight, clinging folds of her severely plain black dress. A younger woman lay on a sofa near her; and by the mantelpiece stood the beautiful girl who had attracted so much admiration from the Rector's family. She looked flushed and angry, her bright eyes flashing defiance at her

mother; but as the Carltons entered, a smile broke over her face like sunlight, and chased the clouds away. She made a hasty step forward to meet them, then checked herself, and drew back, as Madame de Fontaine bowed haughtily to her visitors.

After the usual salutations, Madame de Fontaine introduced her two daughters, Mathilde and Adrienne, apologizing for the former's inability to rise, as her ailment kept her entirely confined to her couch; she had been an invalid some time. She was about six and twenty, but looked considerably older, and was dressed in nunlike fashion, with a close white net cap covering her dull-coloured fair hair. She had an unhealthy, pale complexion, and seemed to be in a state of hopeless, helpless prostration, both mentally and physically. She smiled a faint wan smile, as Mrs. Carlton took her hand, spoke to her tenderly and cheeringly, and sat down by her, saying,

“I am doubly glad to have made your ac-

quaintance, my dear, for since you cannot come to us we must come oftener to you, and do all we can to lighten your suffering and brighten your life."

"My daughter's life is brightened from within," said Madame de Fontaine, sternly. "This world has no power either to increase her happiness or lessen her pain. She has been hurt in Our Lady's service, and is patient and content to suffer."

"Of her patience and goodness I have no doubt," replied Mrs. Carlton, looking compassionately on the poor invalid's wan face; "but it is surely as much our duty to alleviate as to bear suffering."

"I don't know," answered Madame de Fontaine, "our two churches teach different lessons on that, as on many other subjects. How often have saints suffered self-inflicted tortures!"

"Yes, but there is no proof that they were right in so suffering."

"How could they be wrong? They morti-

fied the flesh, in order to purify the spirit."

"They were no doubt right in their intentions, but I think wrong in their practice, for I can never believe our Creator takes pleasure in the suffering of his creatures. He never sent pain and sorrow into the world to be sought after as kindly gifts; they come to us as the result of evil done; and though they may act as chasteners, they ought not to be hugged and cherished as virtues. It is no merit in any man to be self-tortured; we should avoid both mental and physical suffering by every means in our power. Why has God made this world so beautiful, and given us power to appreciate its beauties, if we are not to enjoy them?"

"That is easily answered. The world is one wide field of temptation, a vast pitfall, covered with flowers, to catch the feet of the unwary—but woe, woe to him who stumbles!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Carlton, sighing, "I see our ways of thinking lie so far apart, that were we to wander through the realms of thought for

ever, we should never meet. To me it seems that God is the beautifier of all earthly things, that he has surrounded us with evidences of his beneficence, greatness, and glory, and that it is our duty to enjoy what he has made so fair—to tempt and to destroy is the province of the Evil One.”

Attracted by the unusual turn the conversation had taken, the young girls had drawn near. Adrienne looked deeply interested in the question so unintentionally mooted; Mathilde flushed slightly, and bent patiently over the altar-cloth she was embroidering. As Mrs. Carlton finished speaking, Adrienne caught her hand, and exclaimed eagerly,

“That is exactly what I think, and what I often tell mamma, when she says I am wicked and doomed, because, in spite of——” She checked herself, and then continued, in the same excited tone—“Because sometimes I cannot help being happy—I feel so full of life, my heart seems as if it would overflow with

joy, for no reason except that I love to live—and I clap my hands and break out into a song, and wish I had wings like a bird—”

“That you might fly away from the home that shelters you, like an ingrate as you are,” said her mother, with cold severity; then, addressing Mrs. Carlton, she added—“Gloomy as this house appears, so far as the bustle and pleasures of the world are concerned, there is no lack of excitement within it. My daughter Adrienne’s turbulent spirit is for ever breaking out in rebellion against all that is holy and right.”

“Against all that *you* consider holy and right,” interrupted Adrienne, “yes—I do rebel! I rebel against the wretchedness of my life—the gloom and misery of this miserable home—for you hate me, *mother*,” she emphasised the word; “and I often wish I was dead!”

Mrs. Carlton was inexpressibly shocked at this sudden outburst of passion; but she gently pressed the excited girl’s hand, and said, soothingly,

"Hush! hush! my child! you do not know what you are saying. Pray pardon her, Madame," she added appealingly, "she does not know the value or meaning of her words."

Madame de Fontaine's features relaxed almost into a smile, as she answered calmly,

"Oh! I am not hurt—I am accustomed to these outbreaks; but *my* religion teaches me to forgive; I wish that hers would teach her to submit."

"Place her in our hands, and at least we will try to teach her."

"And fail, as I have failed, from the hour she was born; but I have now learned to consider my child's ingratitude as part of the cross I am doomed to bear on my pilgrimage through this world, and I bear it cheerfully."

"So cheerfully," exclaimed Adrienne, bitterly, "that you have never tried to win my love, or deserve my gratitude."

"Win!—deserve!" repeated Madame de Fon-

taine, elevating her eyebrows, in evident astonishment at any exertion of that kind being thought necessary.

“My dear young lady,” said Mrs. Carlton, “a child’s love and gratitude are a mother’s rights—there is no question of desert.”

“But there should be question of desert,” persisted Adrienne.

“Remember, you owe to your mother your life.”

“Why should I be grateful for that?—for the gift of a miserable life?—who could be thankful for a poisoned gift? They who give us life should teach us how to use it, and how to make that life happy.”

Madame de Fontaine here interrupted her, and sternly commanded her to be silent; then said to Mrs. Carlton,

“You see the sort of life I lead with my two daughters—the one yields up all the gaieties and pleasures of this world for the glory of the next, and is happy and at peace——”

“Poor Mathilde!” murmured Adrienne, bending down, and kissing the thin hand of her sister. The pitying movement was not observed by her mother, who continued—

“The other sickens for the false glitter of this world’s Vanity Fair, and is wretched because she is deprived of its frivolous follies. I see you compassionate her, but there is no need. Had you seen her an hour ago, you would smile at her farcical parade of her ‘miserable life.’”

“If it was anything to her discredit, I am glad I did not see it,” said Mrs. Carlton, and she endeavoured to change the conversation, but Adrienne would not have it so.

“Tell them what I was doing,” she said, “or they may think I was doing something very bad.”

“She has been guilty of a double fault,” said Madame de Fontaine; “I sent her to her room for an hour’s meditation, and I found her standing before her looking-glass, with her hair hang-

ing about her shoulders, singing and dancing like a lunatic! This was folly and disobedience combined."

Poor Adrienne looked half ashamed and half amused at this *exposé* of her private performance; but on casting a furtive glance at Mrs. Carlton's face, she detected a lurking smile upon her lips; this seemed to satisfy her that her behaviour was not regarded with as much severity as her mother considered it deserved, and she attempted to explain her freak.

"I was in Paris last year," she said, "and I went to a ball at the British Embassy; I often think of it, and hear the music, see the lights and the gay bright dresses, and even seem to smell the perfume of the flowers again—then I get excited—and when mamma saw me, I was dreaming it all over once more. I was ordered to meditate, and I chose a pleasant subject—that's all!"

As Adrienne ended, she turned shyly to Grace Carlton, saw in her eye that she was understood,

and in a few moments the three young girls were engaged in a whispering conversation. Mrs. Carlton lowered her voice to make some excuse for Adrienne to her mother.

“I see how it is,” she said; “your daughter was indulging in a little pardonable vanity—you will excuse her?”

“No,” said Madame de Fontaine; “in this house there is no excuse for folly, which may prove injurious both to body and soul.

Mrs. Carlton steered clear of the point where their opinions might have clashed; she wished to gain the confidence, or at least the toleration of the mother, in order that she might be of service to the daughters, who both struck her as being in a lonely and pitiable condition, though in different degrees. Madame de Fontaine’s appearance, icy manners, and cold cruel face revolted her; but considering herself as a visitor, perhaps an intruder, she felt doubly bound to be courteous.

“I agree with you,” she said, “that it is by

no means well for young people to frequent crowded assemblies and heated rooms, where in reality there is nothing but feverish excitement; but you must admit that there are many pleasures both innocent and healthful."

"Oh! certainly," acquiesced Madame de Fontaine unhesitatingly.

"And in one of these, I hope you will allow your daughter to join us on Friday next. My husband is going to take the parish children for a ramble over the hills; his daughters and a few of their young friends will join the party, nominally to minister to the wants of the little folk, but in reality to enjoy themselves. I hope you will allow Miss de Fontaine to accompany us?"

Adrienne bent forward, and looked with breathless expectation in her mother's face. There was something touching in her mute appealing glance—in the anxiety excited by the prospect of so small a pleasure. Her mother evidently observed it, but looked on the upraised eager

face unmoved. Mrs. Carlton even fancied—it might have been fancy—that she saw a flash of triumph in Madame de Fontaine's eye, as she answered curtly,

“No ; penance must pay for folly. Adrienne will return to her room, and remain there for the next three days.”

Every gleam of pride died out of Adrienne's face ; she clutched Lena tightly by the hand, as though she were afraid of losing her new friends ; then turning on her mother a look more beseeching than her words, she said in a low voice,

“Mamma, forgive me this once—I know I am wild and wayward, but indeed I will try to please you better in future !”

“No !” exclaimed Madame de Fontaine ; “you can cringe, beg pardon for the present, and give lying promises for the future, and all to obtain a paltry pleasure ; but I shall not swerve from my decision. I am ashamed of your meanness and hypocrisy. This is the first time your pride

has been abased, and you have stooped to ask pardon."

"It shall be the last time, as it has been the first," said Adrienne, the bitter flush overspreading her face again, and all the entreaty in her eyes giving way to pride and defiance; "I was a fool to think you had a heart, or that I could reach it!"

Mrs. Carlton exerted all her powers to bring about something like a peaceful understanding, but failed. If Adrienne's heart seemed inclined to soften, a cold glance of her mother's eye, or a freezing word from her thin lips, hardened it again. When Mrs. Carlton rose to take leave, she expressed a hope that their acquaintance, though so unpropitiously begun, might have an agreeable continuance, for their mutual pleasure and profit. On her saying she hoped that Madame de Fontaine would soon pay a visit to the Rectory, the latter replied, "I intend to visit no one; but whenever you are inclined to honour us with a visit, you will find us at home."

With this permission, ungraciously accorded, Mrs. Carlton was obliged to rest satisfied. As she shook hands with Mathilde, the invalid looked up in her face with a gleam of gratitude in her pale, thoughtful eyes, and retained her hand a moment with a soft pressure. Throughout the interview she had not spoken a word, but there was a world of eloquence in her mute, sad face; it told of a heart crushed and trampled down by the harsh spirit of bigotry and superstition. Everything had been done to chill her sympathy with life, and still the sweetest chord of humanity within her; but it was not altogether silenced; at times it trembled and vibrated still, as it was vibrating now beneath Mrs. Carlton's compassionate gaze.

After an affectionate farewell to Adrienne, Mrs. Carlton left the house, full of sad, sympathising feelings, roused by the strange family it contained. Lena and Grace made their remarks very freely, as soon as the gate closed behind them. Madame de Fontaine came in for

all their indignation; while Adrienne received a proportionate amount of admiring enthusiasm, tempered with pity. Mrs. Carlton made but few remarks, and answered prudently when appealed to. She could not, she ought not to approve Adrienne's behaviour, but neither would she condemn it; if she had been compelled to do so, she would have given the verdict "with extenuating circumstances."

For some minutes after the Carltons left, there was a dead silence, broken only by the harsh click of Madame de Fontaine's knitting-needles. Mathilde devoted herself in silence to her work, sorting and arranging the bright-coloured silks. Adrienne had retired to the farther end of the room, and stood gazing with thoughtful eyes out into the bright sunlight, a smile full of meaning occasionally crossing her lips. Presently she turned round, looked straight into the mirror, and began to smooth and rearrange her hair, humming the while a refrain from one of Béranger's airs.

“Adrienne!” exclaimed Madame de Fontaine, in a voice that made her start. The whole expression of her face changed in a moment; she walked slowly to her mother’s side, and stood before her. Madame de Fontaine continued, without lifting her eyes—“Fetch me the large scissors, those Marguerite uses for cutting out.”

Adrienne slowly went on her errand, wondering what they could be wanted for. Mathilde looked inquiringly at her mother, but she continued her work, and never spoke. Presently Adrienne returned. Madame de Fontaine received the scissors from her hand, looked steadily in her face, and said,

“Kneel down!”

“Why?”

“Because I am going to relieve you of one great source of vanity; by so doing, I shall do God service, and you no wrong.”

“But I don’t understand,” said Adrienne, bewildered. “What is it you wish me to do?”

“Kneel!”

“No!” exclaimed Adrienne, drawing her breath quickly, “I will not kneel to you. Why should I?”

“Ah! I forgot,” said Madame de Fontaine, placing her hand on the bell, “perhaps you would rather François should hold you down. Shall I ring?”

“As you please,” replied Adrienne, defiantly, as she crossed to the other side of the room.

Madame de Fontaine rang the bell violently. In answer to her summons François came. He was so accustomed to her arbitrary power, and to consider her authority supreme, that he never thought of questioning her commands, however questionable they might be. Madame de Fontaine looked up as he entered, saying,

“Mademoiselle Adrienne is rebellious again—bring her to me.”

She spoke as though Adrienne had been a child three years old. François took a few steps towards her, and said, in a deprecating tone,

“Mademoiselle!”

She neither moved nor spoke; wrath and indignation stirred strongly in her heart, and the hot blood mounted to her brows.

“Bring her to me!” exclaimed Madame de Fontaine again. “You have brought her to be chastised many times before. Why do you hesitate now?”

“I was a child then,” hissed Adrienne, from between her clenched teeth, “I am almost a woman now.”

Madame de Fontaine motioned impatiently to François; he advanced almost within a step of Adrienne, who turned upon him blazing with rage.

“Dare to touch me!” she exclaimed. “If you lay so much as a finger on me, old as you are, I’ll tear you to the ground and tread upon you!”

“I see you will require help,” said Madame de Fontaine. “Call Joseph.”

“Do not expose yourself to the whole household,” said Adrienne, with a struggle for calmness. “You want no more witnesses to your

petty tyrannies, so cruel, yet so contemptible. Leave the room, François."

She knew it would be in vain to resist her mother's authority any further; her proud passionate spirit, with all its weight of wilfulness and sense of wrong, must yield, in this case, at least, to that iron will. When her mother's stern voice inquired, "Will you kneel?" she answered, "Yes," and knelt down.

Madame de Fontaine removed the net and comb from Adrienne's head, and let the whole mass of her rich raven hair fall like a cloud over her shoulders, and far below her waist. Mathilde, who had been silent until now, half sprang from her couch, and, with an imploring gesture, said,

"Oh! mother, spare that—it is so beautiful!"

"For that reason she must lose it. She will have one vanity the less."

"She will think she has one grievance the more. Do spare it, mother—I will do any penance for her sake."

This was the first time Mathilde had ever ventured a word in opposition to her mother's slightest will. Madame de Fontaine was amazed; she looked at Mathilde for a second in silent astonishment, then said,

"Is disobedience contagious, that it has spread to you?"

"I beg pardon," murmured Mathilde, humbly, and fell back on her couch.

Adrienne looked up and smiled. She knew her mother wished to humiliate her, and she would not be humiliated—to wound her pride, and however much she suffered, she would not show that she was wounded.

"Do not be sorry for me, Mathilde," she said. "After all, it does not much matter. There is no one here to admire my hair, and you know it will grow again, perhaps even more beautiful than it is now."

She bent her head, and in a second the seething sound of the scissors was heard, and the cloudy tresses dropped in thick clusters.

The operation was performed in silence; roll after roll of Adrienne's beautiful hair fell to the ground; once, when the cold steel touched her neck, she shivered, but that was all.

"There!" exclaimed Madame de Fontaine, with a sigh of satisfaction, as she completed her task, "one source of pride and vanity is gone."

Adrienne was pale to her very lips, as she raised her head, rose from her knees, and looked down upon what had so lately been a part of herself; it had been, as her mother truly said, "a source of pride and vanity," but a very harmless one. She had been fond of arranging and re-arranging it after the quaint fashions of other days; she liked to dress it so as to make herself "look like an old picture." Now it was gone, severed, and scattered in dead shapeless masses at her feet; she felt almost as though she had lost a limb.

Madame de Fontaine gathered the silken waves together, twisted and tied them in one

close thick knot, stirred up the fire, and placed it in the flames.


As Adrienne watched it scorching and shrivelling up, she thought it seemed to feel. She trembled from head to foot, and her teeth rattled together—she felt as though some spiritual part of herself was being consumed; but in spite of her evident agitation, a spirit of defiance flashed up into her eyes. She raised them in all their brilliancy to her mother's face, and a bitter smile wreathed her pale lips as she said,

“What a pity you cannot put out my eyes too! You would if you dared, but you dare not blind me! The law would punish you—even if God did not!”

CHAPTER X.

THE VILLAGE DOCTOR.

A pleasant, honest, faithful creature
As e'er was formed by willing nature ;
With a kind friendly heart endued,
The fellow's always doing good.

N the outskirts of Crofton there stood an old-fashioned cottage, with a thatched roof, latticed windows, and a wide stone porch, literally covered with sweet-smelling climbing plants. It had been once a farmhouse, and had stood in the centre of a large garden, which, in a great measure, had been built over ; a road ran within twelve feet of the cottage door. The exterior was unpretending, though picturesque in the extreme. There were rambling out-houses, and the garden, filled with bright blooming

flowers, was shut out from the road by a slight wooden paling, a low swing-gate leading up to the house. On the door was a brass plate, with the owner's name, "Dr. Sterndale." Over the porch swung a red lamp, gleaming at night like a fiery eye through the thick foliage that surrounded it. The interior of the cottage was arranged with an eye to comfort and convenience. Small though it was, it was large enough for the comforts, and even luxuries, of a bachelor's home, for Dr. Sterndale lived with his widowed mother, an old lady between sixty and seventy years of age. On one side of the porch was a large, low-pitched room, with oak panelling, in which were an infinite number of small cupboards; several quaint nooks and corners added to the character of the room; every available space was filled with bachelor-lumber. This was Doctor Sterndale's *sanctum sanctorum*; his library, smoking-room, and study; his "den," as he called it, where he could retire and growl when he was dissatisfied with the world, his pro-

fession, or himself. It was always in a state of general untidiness; books, papers, anatomical drawings, sketches, and instruments, with other miscellaneous articles, were jumbled together in a seeming hopeless confusion; yet he would dive into this heterogeneous mass, and lay his hand upon the very thing he wanted. On the other side was a room which was the very opposite to the Doctor's sanctum; it was of much smaller dimensions, and arranged with scrupulous attention to neatness and order. There a thread was never to be seen upon the carpet, nor a speck upon the polished oak furniture. On one side of the fireplace stood a large old-fashioned easy-chair, and there good old Mrs. Sterndale knitted and netted her life away. There she sat, one moment counting her stitches, the next lifting her eyes to the clock, evidently waiting for her son's return home. She did not wait very long; her sharp ear detected the quick measured tread of his horse's feet long before he came in sight. Presently he rode briskly to the gate, sprang off

his horse, threw the bridle over his arm, and led the tired animal to the stable. Having seen it comfortably stalled and fed, he entered the parlour where his mother waited for him.

"I am afraid I have kept you waiting," he said, stooping over her, and pressing his lips on her wrinkled forehead; "but I could not help it, my patients are so few and far between, that I have to ride fast and long before I earn a pound, mother."

He said this in a cheerful tone, and with a short, dry laugh; but the ghost of a sigh forced itself out as he closed the sentence.

Mrs. Sterndale looked anxiously in her son's face, and her lip twitched nervously as she said,

"You have had hard, up-hill work for years, my boy, and yet you seem not a bit nearer to the top."

"No," he answered; "and I am afraid one day I shall roll down to the bottom, and have to pick myself up and begin the world anew."

“And I must always be a burthen to you,” said Mrs. Sterndale, with a sigh; “*I*, who would give my life to help you, must lie like a useless log upon your hands all the days of my life.”

“My dear mother,” replied the Doctor, taking her withered hand in his broad palm, “if it were not for you, I should have nothing to live for; you talk of being a burthen to me—why, you help to lighten every care I have got; in the midst of my anxieties and petty cares—cares, mother, which sting many a brave, strong man to death, I turn my thoughts to home, where I know your dear old face, bright with a mother’s love, will give me a loving welcome.”

She smiled, and said,

“Ah! my dear boy, I hope you will one day have a younger, fairer face than mine to give you a brighter welcome!”

“I never think of it,” he answered, hastily; “your welcome satisfies me. Sometimes I come

home wearied by capricious patients, rough riding, tired, cold, and hungry, and when I cross my own threshold, I know there is rest and peace for a time. However tetchy I may be, mother, I can always grumble and growl in safety here; you are so full of sympathy and affection, giving all, and expecting nothing; no woman but a mother can do that."

By this time their simple dinner was placed upon the table. He wheeled his mother's chair forward, and seated himself opposite to her.

"Many a great man would give me a guinea for my appetite," he said, as he commenced his frugal meal, with the gusto of a hungry man who has earned his dinner and means to enjoy it. He had not, however, been seated many minutes when a groom in a smart livery galloped up to the gate. The Doctor rose from his seat, went out, and received a letter.

"No answer, sir," said the groom, as he rode off.

A comical expression, half humorous, crossed

the Doctor's face as he opened and read the missive. It was brief, and as he ran his eye over it he smiled, and said,

"Honesty is the best policy, mother, shall be my motto for ever."

"It should always be the policy of a good man," she answered; "for in the end it has an exceeding great reward."

"Query that last," answered the Doctor; "but I will tell you my story, mother. You know I was called out very late last night, and when I got to—but there, I must not betray my professional secrets, even to you; suffice it to say that I found my patient suffering from a usual complaint, for which I had attended her many times before. I was tired of being called upon, for I could do no good without her assistance, and she would do nothing to help herself. She begged me, between tears and hysterical gaspings, to tell her what was her complaint, and how to cure it. I wrote on a bit of paper, 'Drunk;' cure, 'Time and abstinence.'

I slipped the paper into her hand, and left her. That is my story; here is its sequel," and he read aloud the contents of the letter, which ran as follows: "To Dr. Sterndale, for behaving like a man of honour and a gentleman to an unhappy, self-degraded woman."

Enclosed was a fifty-pound note!

"A woman who can behave as generously as that, mother, can have no common mind."

"I can never forgive a woman for giving way to the disgraceful habit of drinking," said the old lady, in deep disgust; "but, as you say, she is certainly very generous—fifty pounds!"

"Her generosity does not lie in the fifty pounds, mother, but in the spirit that can forgive the man who told her of her shame. She must be saved, and I will try and cure her," he added, energetically.

"I have heard that soda-water and brandy is a very good thing—in fact, the best medicine in such a case," said Mrs. Sterndale, innocently.

The Doctor smiled.

“In this case, and in many others—indeed, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred—we might as well throw physic to the dogs; the root of the disease lies in the mind, and no drug has yet been discovered that can reach that.”

“My dear boy,” said his mother, dropping her knitting into her lap, “you have made the medical science the study of your life, and yet you seem to despise it; sometimes you puzzle me.”

“Do I, mother? Then I am sorry for it, for I do not despise it. I am merely dissatisfied, that is all. The more deeply I study, and the more I learn, the more profoundly conscious I am of my own ignorance, and that of the profession generally; for the science of medicine is still in its infancy, we have been groping in the dark for centuries, and though we have made some rapid strides, we have not reached the light yet. I believe that hundreds yearly die of the doctor, when, if nature had been left to

herself, she would have cured them. Many a well meaning though unintelligent practitioner, examines a patient, sees a symptom, and attacks it vigorously with a shower of draughts and a cannonade of pills; but he may plaister and patch, chase the aches and pains from one part of the body to another, and unless he can reach the unseen spirit, he effects no cure, and doing but little good, produces great harm."

"I should think, if the mind were affected, they had better send for a clergyman than a doctor."

"No," he answered, quaintly, "it would be too much to expect one man to teach the road to the next world and the way to live in this. The clergy deal with the spiritual, we with the moral and physical life; and I must own we have the hardest and best part of the work to do."

"But suppose a patient to be only sick in mind, Frederic—what good could you do then?"

"Much, if I go to work in the right way."

I may awaken the sluggish mind to a sense of the duties of life; hundreds of ladies in this cultivated land suffer from ennui—they have nothing to do but to dress and amuse themselves, they make pleasure the business of their lives; but it does not answer, they cannot kill time fast enough, so time in the end kills them. I would try to cure them by pointing out the work that is to be done, and the way to do it; but if I were to attempt abruptly to draw their thoughts away from themselves and their self-made sorrows, they would lose all faith in me, and tread deeper in the Slough of Despond. We are all too apt to centre our thoughts, wishes, hopes, and fears in ourselves; our own petty griefs and troubles are all our care, and the longer we nurse them the heavier they grow.”

“Not so have you nursed your troubles, my boy,” said Mrs. Sterndale.

“No. I have luckily had so much to do with other people’s troubles, that I have had no time to brood over my own. What a poor

miserable devil I should have been, if you had brought me up with full-blown notions of my great expectations, mother—expectations, too, which seem doomed never to be realized.”

“Why will you think so?” said his mother, looking sharply in his face; then lowering her voice, she added—“Three lives are gone already, now only two, a weak old man and a child, stand between you and wealth and rank.”

“Do not speak of it,” replied the Doctor hastily, almost shrinking back; “if I were to begin to count their lives, I might wish them dead; but do not let us talk of such matters. If you are content, mother, *I* am quite happy to remain as we are; indeed, if it were even my lot to own the Trevor estate, I should not know what to do with myself. I have been so used to work, that I am sure I could never be idle. I think I should build an hospital and fill it with the sick poor—they would keep me well enough employed, eh! mother?”

“Of course you would sometimes spend your

days usefully; but your first duty would be to get married—no house is complete without a mistress.”

At this the Doctor went off into a fit of laughter—he always did when his mother spoke of his marrying. She was very anxious to find him a wife among the fair inhabitants of Crofton; but the ideas of mother and son on the subject differed materially. She considered that in a wife he needed some nice elderly woman to take care of him; make his puddings, mend his stockings, and look after his comforts generally, when she was gone.

Youth, intelligence, and beauty she looked upon as useless luxuries, which might perhaps be enjoyed in a rich man's home, but were by no means the necessities of life. She did not know how much the presence of beauty enlivens the poorest home, cheering the eye and gladdening the heart; not that those amiable and kindly qualities, which are absolutely necessary for the happiness of home, should by any means be un-

dervalued ; they lose nothing from the want of personal beauty, but they gain much by possessing it. Good mental qualities are the spirit's light, beautiful under all aspects, as the sun's rays are glorious, no matter through what medium we receive them ; but when they come to us softened and mellowed through a window of stained glass of variegated hues, they are more enchanting still.

As the Doctor lounged away to his study, his mother's voice once more arrested his steps.

"By-the-bye, Frederic, I forgot to ask you what was the matter at the Manor House?" She laid aside her knitting, and looked as though she expected a long explanatory account.

"Oh ! nothing particular. I should say my poor patient was suffering from shattered nerves and a broken constitution ; she is quite young, poor thing, but faded and worn enough for double her age."

"What sort of people do they seem to be?"

"Queer, I should say, and decidedly papistical,

judging from the crosses, crucifixes, and virgin saints (remarkably pretty ones, too) which are placed in every nook and corner of the house. I had to pick my way on tip-toe, for fear of damaging any of these immaculate beings or holy emblems. I believe I saw the whole family; one a most lovely girl, the other the poor invalid I speak of. The mother is a stately old dowager, who looks as if she were trying to make up by the austerities of age for the laxities of her youth."

"And I suppose you came home by the Rectory?" she asked, with assumed indifference.

"Yes," he answered with equal brevity; "I wanted to see the Rector on parish business."

"Parish business! Humph!" answered Mrs. Sterndale. "The Rector is always very active about other people's business, when he had much better be minding his own."

"I never heard he neglected it, mother."

"Ah!" she said, shaking her head and looking mysterious, as old ladies will do sometimes,

“you are as blind as a mole in some things, my boy. I sit here and never stir out for months together, and yet I do believe I see and hear more than you do.”

“Very likely ; but then, my dear old mother, you hear a great deal that is not true ; and as for seeing, you look through magnifying-glasses every day, and all day long.”

“Ah ! well, there is never smoke without fire ; and Mrs. Marsh, who comes to help Deborah wash, says the whole village is talking about it.”

“About what ?”

“Why, about Miss Carlton, of course, and that young Dundas, who has gone into the army, and been made a general of, or something of that sort.”

“It is a pity the village has nothing better to talk about ; and as for Mrs. Marsh, I should have thought she could have found some better employment than that of circulating scandalous reports about her neighbours, especially against

those who should be held in double respect, for they are young and motherless."

"Not motherless, my dear boy."

"True, I forgot—the Rector has been married about three weeks; but a stepmother cannot gain much influence in that time."

"I do not say it is her fault, poor lady, of course she cannot help it; but the Rector ought not to allow his daughter to run wild over the country with such a dashing young man as Archibald Dundas. I never thought much of him, and I dare say he is worse than ever now; the Army is not exactly the place to improve a young man's morals. In my young days we avoided a scarlet coat as we would the scarlet fever."

"I dare say you are right," said the Doctor, frankly; "I have no great opinion of Dundas myself; but, mother," he added, stooping over her, and speaking gently and tenderly, "I do not like to hear you coupling his name with that of Lena Carlton. I wish you would not

listen to these slanders; and, above all, I pray you not to repeat them. You know, if there were no listeners, there would be no tale-bearers; but where there is a market for scandal, the article is sure to be abundantly supplied. They who carry those idle tales about the Miss Carltons, will do the same by you."

"Well, my dear boy," replied the old lady, bridling up, "I do not think people can accuse me of flitting about the country with fast young men."

"No; but they might say something that would be equally unpleasant to you," said the Doctor, as he left the room, and in a few minutes he was in his surgery, pounding pills and mixing draughts. For the first few minutes he compounded in silence—but his natural good spirits soon gained the ascendancy, and he began to sing the chorus of "Cheer, boys, cheer." Though there was no music in his voice, it was pleasant to the ear; there was health and vigour in it; it sounded like the breath of a brave, strong-hearted man.

A quiet, satisfied smile dawned on Mrs. Sterndale's face as she heard her son going about his business in his usual cheerful way. She was afraid she had vexed him; he did not ever like to hear anything detrimental to his neighbours, but when it concerned the Rector's family, it positively gave him pain. His mother did not often regale him with the tit-bits of news with which her friends and neighbours occasionally indulged her; but somehow or other, if she heard anything disagreeable relating to the Rectory, she was sure to tell him, though she knew it would vex him. How strange is this contradiction in our nature, we often love to give pain to those we dearly love. In the present instance, however, Mrs. Sterndale had only fired her first shot; there was a good deal more to come, but she reserved that for another time. She did not like to make him really angry; not that she feared his anger would be directed against herself, for to her he never spoke in an ungentle tone, or unkindly spirit; she feared,

however, lest he should forbid Mrs. Marsh coming to the house, and that would have been to her a great privation, as she depended on that hanger-on for all the gossip of the village.

The old lady sat for some time nodding over her knitting, sending her thoughts now back into the past, then forward into the future, trying to shape out her son's destiny; and inwardly praying that she might live to see him recognised by her husband's family, as the head of his ancestral home.

Mrs. Sterndale was the daughter of a country surgeon, who practised in a small village some few miles from Cambridge; she had captivated and married the younger son of a wealthy baronet, who, naturally enough, was highly indignant at his son's contracting a clandestine marriage, and refused either to see, hear from, or recognise him in any way. This extreme wrath would, no doubt, have died out in the course of time, but fate destroyed all chance of a reconciliation; the young husband died on the

eve of the birth of that Frederic Sterndale who is now so merrily labouring with pestle and mortar in his sanctum at Crofton. The body of the erring son was claimed, carried home, wept over, and buried, with all the honours that velvet pall, nodding plumes, and grand funereal ceremonials had power to bestow. The whole household at Trevor Hall went into mourning; the sculptor was employed upon the monument; but the widow and new-born babe of the dead man were left uncared-for and unregarded.

Weak and broken-spirited, the widow returned home to her father's house; he received her with open arms, stipulating, however, that she should give up her husband's, and be known only by her maiden name of Sterndale. To this, after some little hesitation, she consented. The old surgeon educated and brought up her son to his own profession. On dying he left him all he possessed; it was not much, for his practice was very limited, and consisted chiefly of the

poorer population, and a few rheumatic old ladies, who clung to the old system and old remedies. Young Sterndale, as he was called, felt that there was little prospect of extending his connexion, or improving his practice in the place, for there had lately settled in the neighbourhood a dashing young surgeon from London, who drove a brougham with a pair of spirited horses, had a large establishment, and a pretty wife to boot. Besides possessing all these advantages, he dressed in the height of fashion; everybody knows the prestige that clings to respectability of this description. He who is fashionably attired, lives in a large house, and rides in his own carriage, has a far better chance of success, in any way of life, than the man who wears a threadbare coat and walks through the mire. Besides this formidable rival, two others had lately sprung up; one in the shape of a cold-water cure establishment, another in the form of a Homœopathic doctor. Considering all these things, Frederic Sterndale

thought it better to sell his practice, and remove into another part of the country. Chance directed him to Crofton, where he had now been settled some years. Mrs. Sterndale led a lonely life, devoting herself entirely to her son, in whom her whole heart was absorbed; she was proud of him too, proud of his talent, his goodness, and his affection for herself. She lived in him, and for him; she had no hope but for his welfare, no ambition but for his advancement. For years she had read with unflagging attention, and daily increasing interest, that important left-hand corner of the *Times*, where births, deaths, and marriages are chronicled; through that medium alone did she expect to learn the intelligence she craved after relative to her husband's family. The news she gathered therefrom was meagre enough; but it was something to watch how they died, one after another, and every death was religiously registered in her memory, if not in her Family Bible. Now but two lives stood between her son

and that distinction she so coveted for him; these being removed, he would inherit the home of his ancestors. Poor mother! with her mind's eye she followed her son through the highways and byways of fortune, until he reached the goal towards which all her hopes and wishes tended. If she could only live to see him enter the gates of Trevor Hall as the acknowledged lord and owner, she would lie down and rest in peace.

CHAPTER XI.

LENA AND LAURENCE.

“ O merry world of London ! O aching world of moan !
 How many a soul hath stooped to thee, and lost its starry
 throne ! ”



YOUNG man launched on the great ocean of life, and left to his own resources, resembles a frail bark on the wide seas, with neither compass nor pilot to guide it on its course. Ignorance at the prow, and pleasure at the helm ; the chief guiding star, the light of home, hidden from view, the living vessel is drifted onwards hither and thither ; and where one escapes the sunken rocks and breakers, a hundred are cast, wrecked and ruined, on the shore of Eternity. The love of excitement is

natural to youth, and can scarcely be condemned; it should be moderated, but not suppressed; without some enthusiasm nothing great was ever achieved, nothing permanent ever fulfilled.

When a young man finds himself separated from home influence, home pleasures, and home friends, and, in their stead, is surrounded by the glittering gaieties of the world, it is no great wonder if he sometimes, forgetful of the consequences, indulges in them too liberally. When temptation spreads wide her gates, and allures him at every step into the arms of pleasure, what wonder is it that so few have courage to resist? Perhaps nineteen out of twenty young men are chained to a desk in a Government or merchant's office for a certain number of hours in the day, and then are thrown entirely upon themselves for amusement or occupation. Some few have a home fireside waiting to receive them in its magic circle, there to chat over the events of the day, and while away the evening

hours in interchange of thought and good companionship. Others, having no such home, are compelled to seek their pleasures abroad, and spend their evenings at some place of public amusement. I say "compelled," for who could expect a young man of a lively, excitable temperament to devote his evenings to solitary confinement in some fusty lodging, in a silent, melancholy street, enlivened only by the occasional grunt of a barrel-organ, or the brazen tones of an out-of-tune brass band.

Those who live in the peaceful retirement of a country life can form no due estimate of the trials and temptations which beset their sons on first entering the rushing, roaring tide of London life. Many a father starts his son in London with a plentiful wardrobe, good precepts, and an elaborately-bound Church Service, thinking, believing that he is well provided for, and complacently asks himself, What more can my son want? If the untrained boy turns into the broad, well-trodden road of pleasure, and wan-

ders for a while amidst its haunts, he is regarded as lost; if he drinks too deeply of the Circean cup, and, intoxicated by the delicious draught, falls among the swinish multitude, by whom he is robbed and wounded, there is but scant pardon for him. Had he not been well provided for? Why did he wander from the straight road? He wandered and fell, from the want of that which they had never thought he needed—a home, with the welcome of hospitable, friendly faces, the society of sensible men, and modest women. Wanting these, he fell into the opposite extreme, and was left by the wayside hurt and wounded; ashamed of his bruises and stripes, he dared not go home to be healed.

In some such way had Laurence Carlton been sent out into the world, without any control or influence to keep him in the right way. The profession his father had chosen for him was not to this young man's taste. He hated books generally; but such as the elementary

lessons of law that he was doomed to study he abominated. At the end of six months he had got no further than the first chapter of Blackstone's Commentaries; the only studies which took his fancy were *Bell's Life* and the *Sporting Chronicle*. He frightened the clients of the firm by his sweeping condemnations of law and lawyers, injured their business by his ignorance of the simplest axioms of law, and laboured hard to inoculate his fellow-pupils with his own tastes and habits, till the worthy solicitor, to whom he was sent on trial, thought it best to advise the young man to choose some other profession. He next entered a merchant's counting-house, his father paying a heavy premium that his son might be allowed the privilege of working for nothing. Instead of posting the day's business, however, Laurence was discovered entering grim caricatures of the partners in the house in their own ledgers; he once surreptitiously smuggled a couple of bull-terriers into the counting-house, and indulged in

some combative sport during the busiest hours of business. Of course the mercantile interest could not be supported by such proceedings as these. He was soon dismissed in disgrace, and his father informed of the cause. He often resolved to abandon his sporting associates, and never look into a betting-book again; but the force of habit was too strong to be overcome by such impulsive resolutions as he constantly made. He lost one situation after another, till his father commanded his return home to the Rectory, and vowed he would send him into the world no more. The first day or two of his return to Crofton passed pleasantly enough, but the quiet serenity of home had now no lasting charm for him, and he wandered listlessly about the house and grounds, a burthen to himself and his sisters.

“I tell you what it is, Lena,” he said one day, as he lounged into the drawing-room, where she was sitting alone; “I am getting deucedly tired of this sort of life. My father seems de-

terminated to do nothing for me, and I have a great mind to go back again to London and hang upon my own hook."

"Oh! Laurence, how can you speak of anything so dreadful?" said Lena with a look of horror.

"I don't mean suicide," he answered, "only that I will live by my wits."

"It would be poor living, Laurie, and scarcely worth living for, I think. What could you do now?"

"Do! a great many things. There are ways and means of getting one's bread in London, that you girls have no notion of. I might make a tidy living by chalking a mackerel or a ship on fire on the pavement."

"I am afraid you have not genius enough even for that," said Lena, laughing.

"Or I might tie up my legs and arms, become a mutilated body, and go upon wheels—there is a great deal picked up that way—or travel about the country with a monkey and a

couple of tricksey dogs—or turn fire-eater, and astonish my countrymen by swallowing a red-hot poker and five hundred yards of ribbon.”

“Don’t you think you might as well try to be respectable, Laurie?” said Lena gently; “it would be much less trouble, and certainly far more agreeable.”

“I don’t know about that,” he answered sentimentously; “I don’t like dull respectability, and respectability is generally made a very dull affair. I like to be jolly, and enjoy myself, and I would rather spend an hour with one of my old sporting chums, than with the gravest and wisest judge that ever sat on the bench—I dare say it is bad taste.”

“Yes,” said Lena; “but then I never know how far you are in earnest, Laurie.”

“I’m a blighted flower, Lena; if I had been allowed to follow my natural inclination, and had gone to sea, I should have been an admiral by this time.”

"There must have been some newly-invented scale of promotion, then."

"At any rate," rejoined Laurence, "I should have been out of temptation's way, and might have been a credit to you, instead of a disgrace as I am."

His voice changed from its usual light, careless, reckless tone; there was deep bitterness, mingled with self-reproach, both in his voice and in the quiver of his lip, as he murmured again his last words, "a disgrace as I am." He rose from his lounging attitude, and paced up and down the room. Lena threw down her book, and following him, put her arm through his, and said affectionately,

"No, not a disgrace, Laurence—don't say that! You have been wrong and foolish, no doubt, but you will outlive your folly, and be a good true man yet. When papa sees that you are resolved to change and be steady, he will trust you again."

"Ay, but I am not fit to be trusted!" he

exclaimed, stopping suddenly; "that is what it is—I cannot even trust myself! I make a vow one minute, and break it the next—I resolve to do one thing, and do another—I wish to go the right way, but I am always going wrong—it is no use for me to struggle; I've no control over myself—none! I have no power to guide myself—I am carried away by the current of circumstances like a leaf by a flowing river! I cannot resist it, though I know it will carry me to damnation, yet I still go on!" He paused a moment, then touching his forehead, added, "There must be something wrong in my cranium, Lena, some organ woe-fully out of tune. If it was not for bringing disgrace upon our name, I would soon end it—but the worst has not come yet. You have heard of the Spartan who hid the fox under his garment, and let it eat away his heart, he smiling the while—well, I have had a vulture tied to my heart-strings, gnaw, gnaw, gnawing every hour of the day and night, and you know

how I have borne it—I have never even groaned till now !”

He threw himself into a chair, and buried his face in his hands, while a sobbing sigh seemed to burst from the very bottom of his heart. Lena had never seen her brother in so strange a mood. What could it mean? Had he really done anything very bad? Extravagance, debt, and idleness were bad enough; did he exaggerate his errors, make a monster of his folly, and then tremble at it?—or was there indeed some dreadful difficulty, some overwhelming debt, ready to fall with a crushing weight on him, and on them all?—She knew that such things were. There was Macdonald, the last tenant of the Manor-house, she remembered well his tragic story, how he had speculated and lost his wealth, house, lands, some said his honour too, and how one bright summer's morning his body was found floating in the mill-stream. How far had Laurence the power to ruin himself or them? These thoughts and fears rushed

rapidly through Lena's brain. She must, she would know what ailed him. She laid her hand tenderly on his shoulder, and bent caressingly over him, smoothing back his hair,

"What is it, Laurence, my dear brother?—tell me what it is you have done?—what it is you dread?"

"No—no—you could not help me—my father could, but he will not."

"Oh! speak to him as you speak to me—with regret and sorrow, Laurence; before him you are cold, indifferent, defiant—you don't seem to care how much you have afflicted him; he thinks you have no heart. Show him that you have, Laurence, that you do feel—as I know you do—and are sorry for all that is past. Confide in him, tell him everything—your faults, follies, all—and I know that he will help and support you in your weakness, as he trusts God will support him in his. Laurie, promise me that you will?"

Before he had time to answer her, a servant

opened the door, bringing a card, and the message that "a gentleman wished to see Mr. Laurence."

Laurence took the card, and repeated in a scared tone,

"To see me?"

"Yes, sir. I've shown him into the dining-room."

"Did my father see him?" asked Laurence, eagerly.

"No, sir; master's out in the village."

"Tell him I—I'll come directly."

His voice sounded husky, and as the servant withdrew, Lena saw that his face was deadly white.

"You don't like this man, Laurie?" she said. "Why do you see him if you are afraid of him?"

"Afraid! who said I was afraid of him?" said Laurence, almost fiercely.

"You look so."

"Look so! Pshaw! a fellow can't help his

looks! But I own I am annoyed, Lena; the Rectory, where I have found so cold a welcome, is not exactly the place where I should choose to receive my friends."

"Friends!" repeated Lena; "oh! Laurence, a man does not receive his *friends* with such a look as *you* had just now. Why has he come here, Laurie, and who is he?"

"The devil!" answered her brother, impetuously turning away, and striding towards the door. As he went out, he looked back, and a twinkle of his old fun-loving spirit sparkled in his eyes, as he added,

"Don't be surprised, Lena, if I disappear in a flash of fire, leaving an unpleasant odour of brimstone behind."

He nodded and passed out, leaving Lena wondering, alarmed, and uneasy. She dreaded that some heavier weight was on his conscience than idleness and extravagance. If he would only confide to her the full extent of his follies, she thought, she would speak to her father, bear the

first brunt of his anger, hear all patiently, and plead earnestly until she had won her brother's pardon, and brought about something like mutual confidence between them. At present there was nothing but distrust, and an irritable sense of wrong on either side. Laurence was, or seemed to be, indifferent and heartless, while Mr. Carlton was indignant, angry, disappointed in the past, and hopeless of the future; he knew how vain it is to labour to do good to those who will do nothing for themselves. Since Laurence's return home, there had been but little communication between father and son. They seldom met, except at meals, and then rarely addressed one another. A restraint had gradually crept over them all, when assembled together, and was fast destroying the social harmony of home; every member of the family seeming estranged from the rest. Instead of that perfect freedom of discourse which is the greatest charm of domestic life, the conversation, when the family met, was limited to the common-place

topics of the day ; each seemed fully aware of the other's mental corn, and took evident pains to avoid treading on it. Even Lena, with all her affection for her stepmother, could not bear any allusion to Laurence's faults to be made in her presence ; and, indeed, to do Mrs. Carlton justice, she was by no means pleased to be reminded of them. She really liked Laurence ; there was a genial spirit, a *bonhomie* about him, that attracted her in spite of her better judgment. She knew well he had been foolish and wrong, but she was inclined to excuse, and make a liberal allowance for his follies.

The sins of an agreeable sinner are easily forgiven ; we are apt to view them more favourably than those of a disagreeable one, as things seen in sunlight and in shadow bear quite a different aspect. Mrs. Carlton was grieved to see him frittering away his energies in the listless home-life to which his father seemed resolved to condemn him. Once she spoke to Mr. Carlton, and begged him to give Laurence another start in the world,

to try him once more ; some good results might come of another trial, while no good could ever come from his present inactive life. The more bitterly the Rector condemned him, the more excuse she urged in his behalf, till Mr. Carlton was annoyed, and almost resented her interference as a reflection on his own judgment ; then she pleaded for Laurence no more.

Soon a report reached the village that Laurence Carlton was a frequent visitor at "The Grapes Inn," in the village, where a slate billiard-table, skittle-ground, and gymnasium proved a great attraction, not to him only, but to many others, who were not exactly fit companions for the son of the Rector of the parish. Mr. Carlton was acquainted with his son's predilection for such society as frequented "The Grapes," and spoke to him upon the subject, positively forbidding him to visit that disreputable hostelry ; but the prohibition of a father weighs lightly on a young man of four-and-twenty with such habits as Laurence possessed, and the visits con-

tinued. It was no uncommon thing for Mr. Carlton to pass "The Grapes," and hear within it his son's voice, ringing with loud laughter, echoing the merry jest, or joining in the chorus of some gay roystering song. The Rector's heart would grow heavy in his breast, as he passed on, wondering if his son would ever look back and grieve over the life he was wasting now.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF A DAY'S PLEASURE.

“Of sweet came sour, of day came night,
Of long desire came brief delight.”



HAPPY and well satisfied man Mr. Carlton looked, as he headed his small troop of infantry, on their way to Woodbury Vale. It was a fine breezy morning, which gave promise of a bright sunny day. The vans were speedily packed with their human freight of light hearts and smiling faces, varying from the age of four to fourteen; it was a grand day for them, poor wan things! to them it was almost an incomprehensible joy to think that in Woodbury Vale they would be free to run, to

laugh, to sing, to climb the trees in search of birds' nests, seek wild flowers under the hedges, or gather nosegays of buttercups and daisies. Their young hearts were full to overflowing, and they raised their tiny voices, and gave a hearty "Hurrah!" as the van rolled slowly out from the gloomy "Union" walls. Half the village was astir to see them pass; kindly women gathered their little ones round them, as they stood in their doorways, some smiling, some nodding, all waving their handkerchiefs, as the merry party passed on.

The labourers rested from their work at the way-side, cheered lustily, and flung many hearty good wishes after the poor little holiday-makers.

"The parson's doin' a good work this day," said one.

"Tain't the first he done by many," said another. "He's one o' the right sort. If we'd a few more like him, we'd all be better Christians, I'm a-thinkin'."

"Well," exclaimed a rather sullen-looking

man, passing his hand across his shaggy brow, "they ain't much in my line; I never let a pig nor a parson put his nose into my place, though it's a poor one—they're a interferin' set."

"Ah! you're a stranger," said he who had spoken first. "You don't know our Mr. Carlton. He ain't one o' that sort; he never interferes, except for our good."

"For our good!" echoed the other. "Yes, that's what they all says; when a fellow's out o' work, and cold and hungry, then the parson turns up, and tells us it's all for our good. He fills our heads wi' Bible speeches, but the devil a bit does he gi' to our bellies. He says we oughter pray, and go to church, and be thankful! Ugh! when a feller's nigh starvin', he ain't much in the ways o' prayin'; more t'other way."

"Our'n ain't one o' them sort," said David Brown; "when things go hard wi' us, and we're all down on our luck, he's sure to pay us a visit; but he don't preach and pray, and tell us

we oughter be thankful; he's nothin' like that—he gie's us a job, an' helps to keep the wolf from the door—he cheers us up, an' tells us better times are comin'; he gie's us a hope, yer see, and that helps us to bear the bad. Somehow or other, wi'out sayin' it, he makes us feel that it's God's will we should be troubled, and the braver we bears it, the better for us—that's what I call actin' religion, not talkin' about it. I never knowed a body starve wi'in sight o' the Rectory."

"He's got no pride neither," said another. "Why, t'other day I found him in my place, wi' my two little uns on his knees, tellin' 'em a story, and they listenin' as quiet as angels; seems as my missus was obligated to go out, an' he stayed and took care o' the young 'uns, an' looked arter the fire till she come back. That's what I call a brick of a parson, an' no mistake."

"Did I ever tell you what he did for me?" said one hard-featured, swarthy man, who had

been listening to the others, and now spoke for the first time.

“Don’t suppose he done more for you nor the rest on us,” said David Brown.

“Well, you’ll hear. A year agone I was a lazy good-for-notlin’ rascal, a deal too fond o’ the drink, an’ it’s all through him I give it up, an’ I’ll tell you how. One night last summer I was at the ‘Grapes,’ nigh mad wi’ the drink—for I’d been drinkin’ from house to house all day long. My missus had just found me, and she, wi’ some more womankind, come round, cryin’ ‘Shame’ on me. You know how soon a fellow gets riled when he’s drunk; I was mad enough wi’ the drink, but their cryin’ out and blarin’ at me made me wus; then my mates begun chaffin’ me—for it makes a man look small to have his wife after him. I was nigh wild, and I seized a billhook—I didn’t know what I was doin’, mind—but I rushed on my old ’ooman—she’d the child in her arms, but I didn’t see it, I didn’t see nothin’, nor nobody—I

was wild. I—I'm frightened now when I think o' what I might ha' done. Before I had time to hit her, some 'un seized my hand, wrenched the billhook out o' my hand, and said, quite kind-like, 'Why, Sam, you've been enjoying yourself to-day.' I turned round, and there seemed to be fifty parsons behind me. Now his sayin' so quiet, 'Sam, you've been enjoyin' yourself,' took me aback, an' all the cursin' an' swearin' seemed to go away from me, an' I heard nothin'—see nothin' but him. Well, he didn't say anythin' to aggrawate me, and when I spoke savage to him, like a beast as I was, 'Why, Sam,' he says, 'don't you know me? You and I was always good friends.' Then he sent the womenfolk home—I wouldn't go; so he sat down alongside o' me. After a bit, I dropped asleep; when I woke, he was there still. He took me home, and the wife, contrarywise to her old way, had got a good fire, a comfortable tea, an' a civil word when I got there; an' it was all through him, for he'd told her as she

oughtn't aggrawate a drunken man wi' her clatter. Next day, when I was sober, he come an' talked quite friendly-like; he made me feel I was a scoundrel an' a brute, though he never said it. He showed me how I might ha' committed murder, an' ha' been hanged, and all through the devilish drink. I know I was a scoundrel, an' if he'd looked down on me, an' preached at me, or took no care on me, bad as I was, I might ha' gone worse an' worse." He paused a second, then added: "Ah! mates, if ever one man saved another, body an' soul, the parson saved me. God bless him!"

The Rector was too far on his journey to hear the poor labourer's blessing, but it mingled with the breeze and sunshine and followed him; for the air we breathe is the ever-living witness of the sentiments we have uttered—the pulsations of the air, once set in motion by the human voice, cease not with the sounds to which they gave rise. Strong and audible as they may be in the immediate vicinity of the speaker

at the moment of utterance, their quickly-attenuated force soon becomes inaudible to human ears. But the waves of the air, once raised, perambulate the surface of the earth and of the ocean, and every atom of the atmosphere takes up the altered movement due to that infinitesimal portion of primitive motion, which must continue to influence its path to the end of time. The air thus becomes a vast library, on whose pages are written all that the human voice has uttered, or even whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the latest as well as the earliest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled.

If Mr. Carlton could have been an invisible witness of this brief scene, he would have been more gratified at receiving the rough tribute from these poor people's hearts than by the presentation of a whole service of plate, in the presence of an admiring congregation. The greatness of great men is trumpeted abroad

with mighty soundings in the world's ears; but the greatness of a good man, such as Mr. Carlton was, vibrates through the hearts of such as these, and is heard in heaven.

The ladies of Mr. Carlton's family drove in open carriages from the Rectory, and a merry party of young men and maidens they were; there was a great deal of laughing and shifting before they could arrange themselves to their mutual satisfaction. As soon as the young folk had settled their party, Mrs. Carlton made her appearance, drawing on her gloves as a finishing touch to her toilette. She looked down the lane and across the fields expectantly.

"Who are you looking for, mamma?" said Lena, for latterly that endearing name had fallen naturally from her lips. She rarely called her father's wife Mrs. Carlton now.

"For your brother and Mr. Sterndale, who more than half promised to be of our party," she answered.

"Laurie is not coming, I know, for he told

me he had some of his own business to look after; as for Mr. Sterndale, we never can make sure of him; I do not think it is any use to wait."

"Well, perhaps not," said Mrs. Carlton, "a doctor's movements must necessarily be uncertain; if he can, I daresay he will join us at Woodbury Vale."

So saying, she stepped into the carriage, and off they started at a good brisk pace; but by degrees their speed was slackened, and occasional stoppages delayed their journey; sometimes they alighted, and sauntered along the lanes, hunting for wild flowers, or gathering some tempting bunch of honeysuckle, or wild roses which were still blooming in the hedges. Thick clusters of rich luscious-looking blackberries created general longing, and the chivalrous spirit of the gentlemen was called into action; they were sent on a crusade, over hedges and ditches, wherever the most tempting berries hung, to the imminent risk of patent boots and delicately-

gloved hands. There was much laughter and harmless banter flying about, especially when the gay cavaliers attempted to gain some lofty branch, and failed. Their young voices and clear ringing bursts of laughter echoed musically through the air, till at last Mrs. Carlton declared she would have no more wandering, they must go direct on or they would never reach their destination. As it was, however, they got to Woodbury Vale just in time to see the Rector, and his cavalcade of merry children winding slowly through the lanes.

The young folks divided themselves into parties; some strolled among the hills, others wandered over to the ruins of an ancient monastery which lay in the valley about half a mile distant. A fine picturesque ruin it was, with its crumbling walls covered with lichen and wild ivy; its solemn cloisters, dark and lonely, were overshadowed by the tall elms that grew without, their wild branches tossing to and fro, cast ghostly shadows on the moss-covered ground beneath; one might

almost imagine the shadowy forms of the old monks were still wandering round their favourite haunts, grim guardians of the monastic ruin.

Lena and her young friends penetrated into every nook and corner; they crept along the crumbling walls, and up the broken stairs, wherever they could find a footing, disappearing from one place, reappearing in another, and darting out unexpectedly upon each other. The bright joyous creatures of the present, fluttered gaily among the ruins of the past. Their gaiety seemed to be out of harmony with the scene; they were too full of the rich exuberance of careless untried life, or they would have walked with light steps, and hushed voices, among the mute memorials of bygone days. To be able to appreciate thoroughly the visible ruins of the past, where time's harsh tread has trodden man's noblest works into crumbling dust, it is necessary to have outlived the freshness of youth, and to be able to look back upon the ruins of an

actual life ; for however bright may have been our lot, however tenderly time may have used us, there must be many a solitary ruin, where lie withered hopes, lofty aspirations, noble impulses, and projected works, all crumbling to decay—the wreck and ruin of a spiritual past, as visible to the mind's eye, as are the quaint picturesque ruins to our actual sight.

In one of their peregrinations, they came upon a damp desolate spot, where the long dank grass and rank weeds grew abundantly upon the rough sunken ground ; here and there, lay some piece of sculpture, defaced and broken, a crumbling column, or a bit of shapeless stone. What could that dingy place have been ? Some merely peeped in, and ran away, glad to escape into the bright sunshine ; but Lena, more curious than the rest, peeped into every cranny, conjecturing one thing and wondering at another. At last she stooped down, and picked up, from among the long grass, a skull ; she at once called to her companions, and showed them

what she had found; they were disgusted by the exhibition, and she was assailed by such cries as—

“Oh! what a horrid thing! how could you touch it—I declare it frightens me to look at it.”

“Faugh!” said another, “this must have been the old monks’ burial-ground. Do throw the thing away.”

“No,” answered Lena, “I like it. Look! here is a bunch of ‘Forget me nots’ growing out of the eyes.”

“And what lovely ‘Forget me nots’ they are, Lena, do give them to me,” said one.

“I would not disturb them for the world,” said Lena, earnestly; “poor skull!—it seems to speak to me.”

“What an idea!—but pray what does it say?”

“Take me to my lady’s chamber, and tell her though she paint an inch thick, yet to this favour she must come at last,” replied Lena, holding up the skull.

"I am sure I have heard that somewhere before," said one fair girl, thoughtfully.

"Why, it is out of *Hamlet*, to be sure," said another.

"Ah! but I should like to hear a nice real legend—there must be hundreds connected with such a place as this."

"Who knows what strange story might cling about this very skull?" exclaimed one, "if we could only find it out. I should like to know something about it—I wonder whose it was!"

"It might have belonged to one of those grand old monks, who thought, worked, and prayed here in some solitary cell, far away from the rushing, roaring world; content to serve God in silence—working without favour or applause for the great world's benefit. Or, who knows, perhaps it belonged to some thoughtful scholar, who devoted his wisdom, his labour, and his life to a thankless nation, and came here to hide his disappointment, still with a craving after the world's honour and renown, longing,

if not in life, in death to be remembered; and who knows," added Lena, excitedly, "but he is remembered; we may hear him in the quaint legends and wise sayings of old times; or perhaps he was a poet, and sings to us still in the musical rhymes of past ages. See, so earnest was the yearning, so deep the cry to be remembered, that even here, in this empty skull—where the poor brain lived and throbbed in its passionate longing—outspring these sweet flowers, an embodiment of the poet's prayer, a cry from the grave, 'Forget-me-not!'"

A dash of enthusiasm, and an earnest spirit, will generally arrest the attention of the gayest triflers for a time, and Lena's merry companions listened without interrupting her; when she had done speaking, one said,

"Why, Lena, you speak as though you believed all you say."

"And so I do," she answered; "it is all real to me; I can build up this skeleton form, clothe it in cloak and cowl, and send it wan-

dering through these ruined cloisters—" Here she was interrupted by voices calling to them from the opposite side of the ruins. A small detachment from the main body of pleasure-seekers had been sent in search of the rambles. All except Lena speedily obeyed the summons; she lingered for a few minutes, and searched about till she found a bright, sunny spot, there she buried the skull, covered it up with moss, and left the blue Forget-me-nots, still lifting their meek eyes to the sun; then she followed her companions. When they rejoined their party, they found Mrs. Carlton busily engaged in the commissariat department, unpacking huge hampers, amid the rattling of plates and dishes, and the hurrying to and fro of her assistants, who spread the savoury feast upon the grass. The poor little ones, for whom the feast was really given, were exuberantly happy, some running down into the meadows, playing hide-and-seek among the haystacks, gathering buttercups, making daisy-

chains, and decorating themselves with whatever wild flowers came in their way. Some few hovered round Mrs. Carlton, eyeing the savoury dishes with longing glances, and the very young children rambled hither and thither in a state of restless excitement, tumbling over one another, shouting and crowing with delight. Presently Lena stopped suddenly, and exclaimed,

“Look, papa, there is Mr. Sterndale, driving as fast as he can, with a lady by his side!”

The Rector shaded his eyes, and looked in the direction she indicated.

“Yes, it is he, certainly—but the lady cannot surely be his mother! There is a great dog, too, and he has none!”

They were not left long in doubt, for as the Doctor, in his old-fashioned gig, came nearer and nearer, Adrienne’s beautiful face was easily distinguished. Lena and Grace hurried down the hill to meet her. Mrs. Carlton

presented the young lady to her husband, who gave her a cordial welcome; then the girls carried her off, dog and all, to join their young friends.

"I am glad Madame de Fontaine has changed her mind," exclaimed Mrs. Carlton, addressing Mr. Sterndale. "She refused my invitation—discourteously, I thought; but I suppose, as you are her escort, we owe the pleasure of seeing Miss de Fontaine to *your* intercession?" She looked at him inquiringly.

"Well, not exactly," he answered, pursing up his lips with a peculiar expression, while his eyes twinkled mischievously. "You do not owe her coming to me, though, as you see, I certainly was instrumental in bringing her here—but see, how happy your little folk are looking!" he added, abruptly changing the subject, as though he did not wish to be asked questions; "I must go and contribute my mite to their amusement!"

Saying which, he plunged down the hill among the merry little revellers, and in another moment

was once more a child among them. Mrs. Carlton certainly thought it strange that Madame de Fontaine, evidently so stern and prim, should refuse *her* invitation, and then entrust Adrienne to Mr. Sterndale's care! She thought his manner was especially reticent upon the subject; but she resolved upon the first opportunity to learn, from Adrienne herself, how Madame de Fontaine's scruples had been overcome. Meanwhile, Adrienne was as gay as a bird; the girls noticed that her beautiful hair was cut short, but as she made no allusion to the subject, they made no remark. She soon became the life and soul of the party; all the vivacious spirit of her southern nature burst forth with unrestrained freedom, rippling and sparkling, like a babbling brook escaped from some unnatural bond that had hitherto restrained its flow. As the day wore on, the excitement gradually lessened; the children had grown weary of their exuberant joy, and abandoned their romping games.

Mr. Carlton gathered them under the green trees and told them tales. Some of the elder girls sat chatting together, enjoying the cool breeze; a few chose a ramble through the neighbouring wood, where they wandered amidst the thick umbrageous foliage, careless, gay, and happy—rich in the enjoyment of young life, without a thought of the morrow, or a care for the future. Perhaps some young spirit was there launched upon the sea of poetry and romance, and listened, for the first time, among those murmuring boughs, to the voice of gallantry—the tribute of young manhood to grace and beauty. Pleasant courtesies, sounding sweet, but meaning nothing, were uttered as the young men moved aside the heavy branches for their pretty companions to pass beneath, while the softened sunlight crept through the dancing leaves, and cast a flickering light upon bright eyes and smiling faces.

Adrienne, with Lena and two or three others, rambled away to the ruins, Lena declaring she

must have another peep at the old skull—she should not be surprised, she said, if its owner had spirited it away. Adrienne delighted them all with her eloquent description, of the magnificent ruins of châteaux and churches in the south of France. Lena, who always found a ready listener in Mr. Sterndale, was busily telling him about the skull with the flowers growing in it, and carried him off to show him the place where she had found, and where she had buried it. Having exhausted her own surmises and wonderings, she demanded of him some legend, real or imaginary, about the Abbey. He looked down on her excited face, and listened to her in silence; he was thinking more of her than of the words she spoke. It was not often that he, in his hard working life of reality, had time to indulge in sentiment, but Lena's sweet face opened to him a world of poetry and romance; it was a book wherein he read such tales as God writes on the face of women, to be read only by the man who loves her. Looking on

her, he caught a glimpse of an ethereal paradise—but the gates were soon closed against him; he must drive all his thoughts away from her, out into the world, he must think or dream of her, or of her beauty, nevermore. Her reiterated demand for the legend roused him from his contemplative fit. He smiled, and promised that she should have a legend as soon as he had time to make one, all written down, and so full of the marvellous as to satisfy even her. After a brief pause, he added,

“But you have commenced the romance of reality since I saw you last, Lena.” She looked quickly up in his face. “I know it is to be kept a secret from other people, but your father confided it to me.”

“He has told you all about it, then?”

“Yes, but I have not had an opportunity of congratulating you till now—and I do congratulate you, with all my heart.”

“Thank you—you have known us both so long, I knew you would be glad to hear of it.”

"I should always be glad to hear of anything that makes you happy."

"And I am the happiest, as well as the most fortunate girl in all the world," she answered.

"I do not know," he said; "if you were to say that *he* was the most fortunate man, I should agree with you."

"Ah! you only make that common-place speech to flatter me; but you must know in your heart that the good fortune is all on my side. Archie, young, rich, handsome, with his true heart and glorious spirit, might have married any woman he pleased; yet he has chosen me! and I ought to feel honoured and happy—and so I do."

"Some women delight in self-abnegation, Lena; you are one of them—you have erected your god, and I suppose will worship it, till you find it is mere clay."

"How coldly you say that! You always speak as though you did not believe in Archie."

“And I do not believe in him to the extent you do, certainly,” said Mr. Sterndale.

“That is because you do not understand him.”

“Well, upon the very best understanding, you would hardly expect me to fall down and worship him.”

“No,” she answered, her colour rising rapidly as she spoke, “but, I feel, a day will come, when you will be proud to say ‘I knew that man.’ You knew him when he was a boy, and played cricket, and went birds-nesting with him, and that is the reason that you do not recognise his great soul, now that he is a man. I know he will distinguish himself, for he has that within him which must stir the world to wonder and admiration—the future will bring it out. If you could only take one glance forward into the years to come, you would see him surrounded by those glorious gifts and honours which the world showers on great men.”

“It is fortunate for us all,” he replied, gravely,

“that the future is impenetrable; if we could lift aside the veil and look upon it, see all the pains and sorrows of existence, the future would seem like a hydra-headed monster, armed at all points—few would have the courage to live.”

“You take a one-sided view of the future—you see nothing but its hard lines, and thorny places. I would take a wider range, and see all the pleasant views and sunny spots. I know there must be thorns and briers to scratch and wound us now and then, but among them some sweet fragrant wild flowers are growing.”

“True, but in looking over an extensive prospect, one sees only the short jagged edges and rocky points of the mountains standing up in the full glare of the sun; the small bright flowers are too minute to be seen. Rest assured it is better for us all that we should walk blindfold every step of our lives. Hope helps to cheer and guide us through the dark days of our sorrow, and points forward to——”

"Hark!" exclaimed Lena, interrupting him with a startled look, "what cry was that?"

"I heard nothing," he answered, "but the sound of the children at play."

"No! it was a cry of pain—and see! there is my sister and ever so many more—all hurrying one way. Oh! come!—do come!"

As she spoke, she caught him by the arm, and dragged him along, till they reached the group of hushed and frightened girls, who surrounded Adrienne de Fontaine. Tempted by a bunch of golden broom, she had climbed up to a dangerous part of the ruins, where the broken stones crumbled beneath her feet at every step. In vain her companions had warned her, she had crawled and scrambled along till she gained her prize—she had grasped it firmly in her hand, and was triumphantly waving it above her head, when, flushed and excited, she grew careless, lost her footing and fell. There she lay, just as she had fallen, her eyes closed, the long dark lashes resting on the marble cheeks, while a stream of blood was

slowly oozing from a wound near her temple. The dog stood by her with drooping tail, evidently conscious that his mistress had met with a serious accident. Quick as thought, Mr. Sterndale was on his knees beside her; his keen practised eyes soon ascertained the extent of her injuries; he was assailed on all sides, by eager inquiries from her frightened companions.

“What is it, doctor?” “Is she much hurt?”
“Is she dead?”

“No,” he answered, quietly; “thank God, she is not dead—she is only stunned; do not crowd round her. If you really wish to be of any use, fetch some cushions and cloaks, and send Mrs. Carlton here—first ask her to order the carriage to be driven as near this spot as possible.”

He glanced round, and saw the impossibility of getting it within some hundred yards of the spot.

“Ask the Rector to come too,” he added;

"we must make a litter, and carry her down the hill."

Lena was following her companions, but he stopped her, saying—

"You can stay, Lena; you may be useful, and will not pester me with questions—there, kneel down and support her head—so." The poor girl moaned sadly as they moved her, and Lena trembled. "Do not be frightened," he added—"she is not conscious of feeling." He wiped away the blood, and dressed the wounded temple. "Wheugh!" he murmured to himself, "she has just escaped; the eighth of an inch nearer, it would have been all over with her."

In addition to her wounded temple, he ascertained her leg was fractured. He attended to her, so far as he could, upon the spot, then impatiently awaited the arrival of the carriage to convey her home.

Mrs. Carlton hurried to the spot in great anxiety; her distress was greatly increased when Mr. Sterndale said—

"Yes, it is a sad case—very, especially as I believe this was a stolen visit."

"How?"

"I met Miss de Fontaine about half a mile off; she looked tired, and was sitting on a stile to rest. I, of course, was very much surprised to see her so far from home, and in such a position; but it was not my place to ask any questions. I spoke to her, and she said she was coming to join your party, so I offered to drive her on."

"You should have persuaded her to return home," said Mrs. Carlton, gravely.

"How could I? I know very little of them, and, whatever I thought, I felt I had no right to ask questions or make remarks; to me Miss de Fontaine was a young lady to whom I owed the courtesy of a man, and I paid it."

"It is very unfortunate," said Mrs. Carlton, thoughtfully; "but there is nothing to be done—nothing; we must take her home, and bear out the matter as best we can."

Adrienne's accident was a sad termination to the day's pleasure. A hush fell upon the whole party; there were no more smiles; there was an end to merriment—the repast was even got through in silence. They spoke together in low voices, and with grave faces, during the homeward route. The very children huddled together in the waggons, and talked in whispers; the cracking of whips and rattling of wheels were the only sounds to be heard. The sad return home was a striking contrast to the gay departure. A litter was improvised, and under Mr. Sterndale's direction Adrienne was gently carried down the hill, placed in the largest carriage, and driven slowly home to the Manor-house. Mrs. Carlton was greatly troubled; she dreaded the meeting with Madame de Fontaine; she had a guilty, uncomfortable kind of feeling, as though she had to be answerable for Adrienne's accident as well as for her disobedience. However, out of evil there sometimes springeth good, she said. She thought that perhaps the

sight of the daughter, struck down and suffering, might soften the mother's heart, and win sympathy for the present, and pardon for the past; for the silent, solitary stillness of the sick-room sometimes works wonders in the human heart. The world is all shut out, and we have time to think over our own shortcomings, and make allowance for those of others.

Once or twice during the journey the poor girl moaned sadly, and opened her eyes; they were dull and blank, their fire had died out, they had not even an expression of pain. Mr. Sterndale watched carefully over his patient, to save her as much as possible from the motion of the carriage. It was a long, dreary drive, and when at last they reached the Manor-house, they found the whole household evidently on the alert. As the carriage drove up, the gates rolled back to admit it; at the hall door, grim and stolid as usual, stood the old French manservant; within the hall, seen indistinctly in the twilight, were the other servants, with watchful

faces and curious eyes, evidently waiting for their young mistress's return. As Mr. Sterndale sprang out of the carriage, Madame de Fontaine herself appeared, descending the stairs at the further end of the hall; her servants made way for her, she passed through them, and stood by Mr. Sterndale's side. She cast a quick, searching glance into the carriage, then turned her eyes inquiringly on his face without speaking.

"I am sorry, Madame," he said, "to be the bearer of ill news to you, but Mademoiselle de Fontaine has had a sad accident——"

"Dead?" the word seemed to come with a hissing sound from between her teeth. Mr. Sterndale recoiled as the word struck his ear.

"Dead?—no, thank Heaven, not dead, but seriously hurt." He felt he was getting angry at the lady's cool, passionless manner, and there was a degree of peremptoriness in his tone as he added, "*I* am responsible for her life, will you be good enough to give direc-

tions where she is to be carried, for wherever she is laid now, there she must remain undisturbed for weeks, perhaps months."

Madame de Fontaine addressed her servants briefly,

"See that Mademoiselle's room is prepared;" then, turning to Mr. Sterndale, she added, "she can be taken up to her room at once."

"Is it impossible for her to remain on the ground floor?"

"Quite."

"I am sorry for that," said Mr. Sterndale, glancing uneasily at the staircase; "I am afraid the motion of carrying her upstairs may disturb her painfully."

"She can be moved on her sister's invalid couch; it has a very elastic spring, and I think you will find the motion easy."

Under Mr. Sterndale's direction, the couch was wheeled into the hall, and, with Mrs. Carlton's gentle help, Adrienne was lifted from the carriage, and placed upon the couch. The

light of the setting sun streamed through the stained-glass windows, full upon the white face of the stricken girl. Madame de Fontaine had stood by, silently watching their movements until now, when she stepped forward, and looked down upon the pale face and motionless figure. They all drew back, and left the mother to gaze in silence on her child. Did she feel sorrow or regret?—would she stoop down, kiss the pale lips, and wake the unconscious spirit with a promise of pardon? No; after silently regarding her for a moment, she raised her head, and said impressively,

“The curse of God has fallen upon her already.”

Adrienne moved, as though the clear, cold voice had penetrated her spirit, and stirred her into something like consciousness. She half opened her eyes, and a low, wailing cry issued from her lips,

“Mother—forgive—forgive me.”

Mrs. Carlton caught Madame de Fontaine’s

hand; tears started to her eyes, and her voice trembled, as she pleaded,

“Oh! take her to your heart, Madame—she has been wild and wayward, but see how she is struck down!—she will see all her folly, and repent, if you will only forgive her freely now!”


Madame de Fontaine drew herself up haughtily, as she answered,

“I need no one to remind me of my duty. I do forgive her, for I am a Christian; but I cannot forget that I have a graceless child. God’s hand has struck her now for disobedience, the crime for which angels fell—I am saved the task of punishment, and I rejoice.” She turned from Mrs. Carlton to Mr. Sterndale, “Doctor, give your orders, and attend your patient.”

CHAPTER XIII.

SICKNESS AND SORROW.

“ O mother ! pray you turn your face away,
Or I shall well believe you wish me dead !
You will not smile, though here I stricken lie,
And beg for love, as children beg for bread.”

HE couch was lifted up, and the suffering girl carried slowly up the stairs, Mr. Sterndale directing and aiding at every turn. Madame de Fontaine made a formal curtsey to Mrs. Carlton, then turned away, without a word of inquiry, of thanks, or of farewell. She crossed the hall, and followed the melancholy procession up the stairs. Mrs. Carlton's heart yearned after the wild, wilful, suffering girl; she longed to offer her services, to be nurse or comforter; to show at least her sympathy with the family in its time of trouble;

but the cool, repellent manner in which her first advance had been received, effectually checked any further attempt to improve her acquaintance with the family. She was grieved beyond measure at the unfortunate turn which affairs had taken; they were perplexing enough before, now they seemed hopelessly entangled. The estrangement between mother and child was unaccountable—it was a psychological riddle, that Mrs. Carlton, with all her knowledge of human nature, was unable to solve. Adrienne's grave act of disobedience, and its lamentable result, seemed to block out all present hope of reconciliation and peace. Madame de Fontaine evidently resented both on Mrs. Carlton, as though she had been the cause of all the mischief; and so perhaps she had, though indirectly; for if she had not paid that first unlucky visit, and given the invitation to the feast, Adrienne could not, in defiance of her mother's will, have been present at it.

After Madame de Fontaine had left her, Mrs.

Carlton stood in the hall for some minutes, amazed and abashed. Her cheeks glowed with anger at the treatment she had met with. Under existing circumstances, she had not expected to receive a very warm reception; but she had hoped to have an opportunity to explain matters, and to express her feelings both of regret and sympathy; she could have forgiven a scene of stormy indignation; but Madame de Fontaine's cool contempt confounded her. She found herself gazing longingly up the empty staircase, and suddenly became aware that she stood alone, and unwelcome, in the home of a stranger. The hall-door was open, the servants stood by, evidently waiting and expecting her departure. She turned quickly to leave the house, when she heard her name uttered in a quick, smothered tone, and turning her eyes in the direction of the sound, she saw Mathilde hurrying, as fast as her crutches would permit, across the hall. Mrs. Carlton felt a thrill of pleasure as she went forward to meet her.

“Oh! Madam,” exclaimed Mathilde, evidently much distressed, “my poor sister!—is she much hurt?”

“I hope, I pray not,” replied Mrs. Carlton, cordially clasping Mathilde’s offered hand; “but you will hear all presently. Mr. Sterndale is with her, and she could not be in better hands; he is an excellent surgeon; under his care she will need only a kind and tender nurse,” added Mrs. Carlton, laying great emphasis on the last words.

Mathilde understood her meaning, and answered hastily,

“And she will have it. Mamma and I will watch over her by turns.” The thought glanced through Mrs. Carlton’s mind, that a stern, unloving mother was no fit nurse for a suffering child. Mathilde seemed to read her thought in her face, for she added, “I see what you think, but mamma is not so harsh as she seems. Her words are much harder and colder than her deeds.”

“Ay! but words sometimes strike cruel blows—the tender spirit suffers more than the tender flesh, and does not heal so quickly. Altogether, this affair of your sister has been most unfortunate; yet Madame de Fontaine is naturally angry.”

“Yes!” exclaimed Mathilde, interrupting her quickly, as though glad to seize on any excuse that would exonerate her mother from the charge of unnecessary harshness, “it is quite natural, is it not?—she has grave cause to be angry. You know, she is our mother, and has a right to our obedience;” she lowered her voice as she added, “obedience is the law of our Church, and of our home; but Adrienne is so wild, so wilful, so beautiful, and will *not* obey.”

“But this accident,” said Mrs. Carlton, “which we all so much deplore, may be the means of reconciliation and peace. Your sister’s spirit may be humbled, and your mother’s heart softened towards her. She may be won by gentle means.”

“Ah! there is my sorrow,” exclaimed Mathilde. “My mother will not stoop to win; she is so firm and strong in her own way of right, that she will not diverge a step to the right or the left.”

“Not even to win back an erring child,” sighed Mrs. Carlton; the words dropped almost involuntarily from her lips; they were scarcely spoken, when she felt she ought not to have uttered them—at least, before Mathilde. She recovered herself, however, very quickly, and added: “I am sure you will convey to your mother my sincere regret at what has happened. Our acquaintance seems doomed to be unfortunate.”

“Yes,” faltered Mathilde, dreamily, as though she was assenting to some vague proposition.

Mrs. Carlton continued—

“I was painfully surprised when your sister first joined our party, alone, and so many miles from home. I had a presentiment that her wild adventure would have a painful result.”

"You were surprised!" exclaimed Mathilde—"you did not expect her, then?"

"Expect her!—no. How could I expect her when your mother had so decidedly refused my invitation?" replied Mrs. Carlton.

"I will explain that to mamma," exclaimed Mathilde, and a gleam of satisfaction shot across her face. Mrs. Carlton put her own interpretation on Mathilde's look as she uttered those brief words.

"Surely," she exclaimed, "Madame de Fontaine could not have supposed that I either countenanced or encouraged your sister's disobedience?"

"I don't know," answered Mathilde, embarrassed. "I believe she fancied—she thought—"

"I see," said Mrs. Carlton, coming to her relief, and smiling her quiet smile; "we don't quite understand one another; when we do, we shall get on better. Meanwhile, I must have patience and wait. Do you think, if I were to call in the course of a few days, I should be allowed to see your sister?"

“I cannot tell,” replied Mathilde, looking wistfully in her face; “but it would be very kind of you to come and try.”

This Mrs. Carlton readily promised to do. After leaving a kind, consolatory message to Adrienne, she took her leave, resolved to persevere in her endeavour to bring about a perfect reconciliation of all parties in this disunited family.

The events of the day had deepened her interest in both Mathilde and Adrienne. Though the one was so diametrically opposite to the other, differing in religion, in tastes, in feelings, and in disposition, as much as in personal appearance, yet there was a strong, firm bond of affection between them; this Mrs. Carlton had detected at the first interview. She felt she had no right to complain, if she should receive many a cool rebuff from Madame de Fontaine; for, in reality, and there was no disguising the truth, she was forcing her acquaintance, unwelcomed and undesired, upon the family. Mrs.

Carlton smiled at the idea that she, with her proud, delicate spirit, should force her acquaintance upon anyone; it was an unpleasant thing to do, but she did not flinch from it; she determined to throw off all feelings of proud susceptibility, and bear and forbear to the uttermost, satisfied that if she could be of any real service at the Manor-house, the end would justify the means. The wan white face of poor Adrienne haunted her the whole of her way home to the Rectory. Immediately on her arrival there, she was literally besieged with questions from Lena and Grace, who met her on the threshold, and commenced their eager inquiries.

“How had she sped at the Manor-house? Had she seen Madame de Fontaine?” and “What did she say? Of course she must have been dreadfully shocked?”

“Why don’t you speak, mamma, and tell us all about it?” exclaimed Lena, as she drew her into the house. “Come, we want to know

everything; begin at the very beginning, when you first drove up to the door—tell us how everybody looked, what they said, and be sure you don't miss a word."

"I have very little to tell," answered Mrs. Carlton. "I certainly saw Madame de Fontaine, but I scarcely spoke ten words to her, and poor Adrienne was carried direct to her room."

"Is she very seriously hurt?"

"I am afraid she has broken her leg," said Mrs. Carlton.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Grace, "and I suppose she'll have to go on crutches for the rest of her life! It would have been much better if she had been killed outright."

"Killed!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlton, greatly shocked. "My dear Grace, how can you speak so thoughtlessly? Better to have been killed in the midst of her disobedient folly? when full of heartburning bitterness, without a word of reconciliation with her mother on earth, or to her Father in Heaven?"

As Mrs. Carlton was speaking, she happened to glance across the garden, and saw Mr. Sterndale driving rapidly along the road. He stopped a moment at the gate—they all three eagerly crossed the lawn to meet him.

“I knew you would be anxious about Miss Adrienne,” he said, “so I thought I would just call and tell you that matters are not so serious as I at first believed; she is very much bruised, and has fractured her leg, that is all—she has been in great pain, but I have left her a little composed; I am hurrying home to send her a soothing draught.”

“She is in no danger?” said Mrs. Carlton, inquiringly.

“None—at present,” he answered decidedly; “and rest assured, I shall watch over her closely. I have no doubt I shall soon set her right.”

“And Madame de Fontaine?”

“Will make an excellent nurse, and I think will do her duty by my poor patient, so far as

her body is concerned, at least—no, don't ask me any more questions," he added, as both girls began to interrogate him; "I can't stop to answer them—I have stayed too long already." So saying, he shook the reins, and the mare trotted briskly homeward.

Mrs. Carlton did not allow many days to pass before she paid her promised visit to the Manor-house. She was admitted without a moment's delay, and was at once ushered into the long library, where she had been received on the former occasion. The window was open, and the bright sunbeams streamed into the room, laden with pleasant perfume. The reapers were at work in the cornfields beyond, and, as Mrs. Carlton glanced out at the open window, she fancied that, as they cut down the ripened grain, she could hear the seething sound of their sickles, mingled with their merry voices, as they sang snatches of old songs to lighten their toil; and wonderfully pleasant and harmonious they sounded, wandering through the still air. She glanced

over the distant prospect abstractedly; her thoughts wandered away from the reapers, back into the past, when other reapers were in the field, and other masters cultivated the soil. The past and the present became a confused medley—old thoughts, old associations, and old times, seemed to become new; clinging fancies crowded upon her memory, and filled it so full of the old time, that the present was obscured, and melted into the past. The prospect changed; she no longer beheld the reapers, no longer heard their song. Other forms peopled the landscape, unreal, unsubstantial shadows, but more visible to her spirit's eyes than was the reality to her mortal sight. One after another the friends of her youth, nay, her youth itself, passed in review before her retrospective glances; the wide gulf that divided her from those early years was overleaped, and for a moment she was a girl again, playing hide-and-seek among the sheaves of corn. It was but a momentary glimpse she caught of the dear old past, that

was dead and buried long ago ; a soft light came into her eyes as she reflected on the changes time had made—how changed was everything!—herself perhaps most changed of all. She could recall no likeness between herself now—the grave earnest woman, and the bright young thing that had gambolled in the cornfields ; they were less alike than the bud is to the flower, the blossom to the ripened fruit. They were the same, yet not the same. And do we not all change equally with years ?—change so much, that, like Mrs. Carlton, on looking back we cannot recognise ourselves. One moment she sighed heavily, as she thought how much time had taken away ; but the next she smiled, for she thought of her husband, and acknowledged that time had given her back more—immeasurably more, than it had taken. The lover of her youth, the idol of her whole life was hers now—hers, till death's cold hand should part them. He had been tried in the fires of affliction, till he had come out pure gold, without

alloy; and he was her own now—hers to cheer, to console, and to comfort until the last. A look of serene calm diffused a holy light over her whole countenance. She looked no more regretfully on the past, but lifted her heart in thankfulness for the present blessings she enjoyed.

Her eyes wandered over the quaint flower-garden, and there, standing among the bright summer flowers, was the grey, sombre figure of Mathilde; her wan, sad face, and drooping figure, as she dragged herself painfully along on her crutches, was a striking contrast to the gay colours and sunshine that surrounded her as with a golden glory. She held a basket on her arm, which she was filling with the prettiest flowers she could find. Mrs. Carlton knew instinctively that they were intended for the decoration of the sick-room, and felt an increased affection for Mathilde, who at that moment glanced up and caught her eye. A smile of recognition had scarcely passed between them,

when the door opened, and Madame de Fontaine entered the room. A ghost of a smile flickered over her face, as she came forward to greet Mrs. Carlton; she shook hands with her, not warmly—that was not in her nature—but with more cordiality than before.

“I owe you many apologies, and many thanks,” she said, in a frank, straightforward manner; “apologies for having wronged you in my thoughts, which I did but a few days ago, and thanks for your kindness to my daughter.”

“Pray don’t speak of it,” said Mrs. Carlton, eagerly interrupting her, “I am only sorry I can do so little, when I am anxious to do so much. Is Adrienne better? I was glad to hear her injury was not likely to be dangerous.”

“It is nothing serious,” replied Madame de Fontaine. “Would you like to see her?”

“Yes, very much indeed; but I should hardly have ventured to ask you.”

“Why not? You have no right to suppose I should refuse you.”

“Well, I certainly had no right to expect you would admit me. I am a mere acquaintance; the sick-room is sacred to friends, and I dare not hope you will yet receive me as one.”

“No,” replied Madame de Fontaine, as though assenting to a mere matter-of-fact assertion.

“Our acquaintance has had a most unfortunate commencement,” continued Mrs. Carlton; “but it shall not be my fault if we are not firm friends before the end,” she added, with her most winning smile.

“It must be as fate ordains it,” replied Madame de Fontaine. “I will be candid with you, Mrs. Carlton, and frankly acknowledge that I should never have sought your acquaintance; in fact, an intimacy at the Rectory is the last thing I should have desired; but Fate, or call it by what other name you will, seems resolved we should become acquainted, and I submit. I shall endeavour to be glad to see you and yours whenever you may favour me with a visit.”

This was scanty courtesy; under any other circumstances, Mrs. Carlton would, of course, have declined to be received on tolerance, but as it was, she was glad to be received on any terms to carry her object. She told Madame de Fontaine that she should avail herself of the permission so circumspectly granted, and she trusted that both families would derive pleasure as well as profit from their mutual intercourse.

“Whether we shall work evil or good to each other, time will show,” said Madame de Fontaine, as she opened the door and led the way to Adrienne’s room. The poor girl was lying on her bed, looking white and wan; she turned her head languidly at the sound of the opening door; her cheek flushed, and a bright look sprang to her face, as she recognized her visitor. She stretched out her hand, exclaiming joyfully,

“Oh! dear Mrs. Carlton! how kind, how very kind of you to come and see me!” As

Mrs. Carlton leant forward and kissed her, Adrienne took her hand, and laid her cheek caressingly upon it, murmuring softly, "I have been so unhappy. I have given you so much trouble, that I thought you would never forgive me."

There was something inexpressibly tender in her tone, and a beseeching spirit looked out from her large dark eyes, as she lifted them to Mrs. Carlton's face. Her heart yearned over the sick girl. She saw there was a luxuriant growth of love and soft emotions in that young nature, ready to stretch forth, and cling to whatever promised them support and nourishment; but if they encountered stern glances, and cold, biting words, they would shrink back withered, as though nipped by an untimely frost. Adrienne's large dog was by her bedside; her faithful attendant in sickness, as in health. He never left her, but sat there day after day, wistfully watching her with his wise brown eyes, and amusing her with his tricks. She had

taught him to fetch and carry at her command, and now he would sometimes do business of his own accord ; strange, however, to say, he never meddled with anything that did not belong to his young mistress. If she was in good spirits, Nep was tricksey ; if she was sad, he was sad too, and would sit with drooping tail and ears, watching for a word or even a smile from her. Most grateful to the suffering girl was this dumb affection.

Mrs. Carlton patted the creature's head, and sat down by Adrienne's bed ; Madame de Fontaine seated herself on the other side, and took out her knitting. Although she did not speak, yet it was evident she kept a strict watch ; not a word, not a look, that passed between Mrs. Carlton and Adrienne escaped her notice. Adrienne kept firm hold of Mrs. Carlton's hand, and seemed to find comfort in its warm, friendly clasp, as she whispered her inquiries after Lena and Grace, in a tone so low, as almost to escape Madame de Fontaine's listening ear.

"I was afraid you would never let them be friends with me again, or even let them come to see me," she murmured softly.

"On the contrary, they shall come and see you as often as you please," replied Mrs. Carlton. Seeing that Adrienne cast a doubting look upon her mother's face, she added, hastily, "As Madame de Fontaine is kind enough to give me the *entrée* of the Manor-house, I am sure she will allow me to include my husband's daughters."

"I ought not to refuse that," replied Madame de Fontaine.

"Oh! thank you, mamma, thank you!" exclaimed Adrienne, with a burst of gratitude. "How ungrateful, how unjust I have been to you! I was afraid you would resent my undutiful behaviour upon them—the only friends I have made in the world—at least, I hope I have made them," and she turned, as far as she was able, towards her mother, and stretched her arms towards her, as though she would embrace

her; but Madame de Fontaine neither noticed her, nor moved a step towards her, but kept quietly knitting. She merely elevated her eyebrows, and said,

“The acquaintances of a day the only friends you have in the world! Why, what a monster of injustice you make of me, to suppose I should blame them for *your* act of disobedience!”

“Oh! mamma, why will you always misunderstand me!” exclaimed Adrienne, as she turned away her head, and closing her eyes, lay for some minutes entirely still, the flush fading slowly from her cheek.

“I cannot misunderstand you; you speak too plainly,” answered her mother.

“She thought of Lena and Grace, and meant to say companions, not friends,” said Mrs. Carlton, anxious to speak, and yet careful to say nothing that could give offence to Madame de Fontaine; she had won her way into the house, and wanted to secure herself a welcome.

"You are very kind to make excuses for her. You see, she does not attempt to excuse herself," replied Madame de Fontaine, glancing at her daughter's still motionless figure.

"I think she is in pain," said Mrs. Carlton, in a low voice; "perhaps my visit has excited her too much."

"Perhaps so," said Madame de Fontaine, drily.

They continued talking in low voices a few moments longer by the bedside. Mrs. Carlton regarded Adrienne with increased interest. She would have given anything for a few minutes soothing conversation with her alone; but Madame de Fontaine had no intention of giving them such an indulgence. She knew she was a restraint upon them, and intended to remain so. Presently Mrs. Carlton rose—she would have left the room quietly, for she thought Adrienne was dozing, and did not wish to disturb her; but Adrienne heard the rustle of her dress, and languidly opened her eyes.

“Dear Mrs. Carlton,” she murmured, “stoop down and kiss me before you go.”

As Mrs. Carlton bent over her, she threw her arms round her neck, and held her close and long, as though she never meant to release her.

“I wish I could talk to you,” she said, so softly that her words scarcely reached Mrs. Carlton’s ear; “but my heart speaks, and I am sure you understand it. You do not think very hardly of me.”

“I think nothing but kindly of you, my poor child,” answered Mrs. Carlton, returning her caress, with a look that went like sunshine to the heart of the lonely girl.

For some minutes after Mrs. Carlton left her, she lay still, with an unusually calm, serene expression on her countenance, a smile upon her lips, and a gleam in her eyes, as though they were following her thoughts to some unknown realm of brightness and peace.

Madame de Fontaine having taken leave of

Mrs. Carlton, reseated herself by the bedside, and continued her knitting, without speaking a word. Mathilde came in after awhile, bringing with her the basket of flowers she had just been gathering. She silently commenced arranging them in a vase by her sister's bedside; after a moment's pause she turned smilingly to Adrienne, saying,

"I have gathered the brightest and sweetest I could find; see! here is the last bunch of your favourite red roses."

"Oh! thank you, dear Mathilde!" exclaimed Adrienne—"how delicious they smell!" She stretched out her hand, and, as she seized them too eagerly, in a moment the leaves fell scattered over her pillow. "See," she added, "my bed of pain is changed to a bed of roses," and she gathered the delicate leaves together tenderly, as though she loved them.

Madame de Fontaine glanced up from her knitting.

"Take away those flowers, Mathilde," she

said—"I don't like them; besides, their odour is unhealthy in a sick room."

"Oh! let them stay, mamma—let them stay!" pleaded Adrienne; "you know, when I am well, I almost live in the garden; and, now that I cannot move, I do so miss the fresh air and bright flowers. Let them stay—I love them so."

"For that very reason you should learn to do without them," returned Madame de Fontaine, true to her narrow notion of her creed; "the things we love best we should put from us. I like a bed of down, but I sleep on a pallet of straw. Self-indulgence is a crying evil, Adrienne; but for that sin, you would not now be lying there. The Lord denies those who do not deny themselves."

"Why should I deny myself the pleasure of enjoying what He has so bountifully given?" exclaimed Adrienne. "Why has God given us the souls to love the bright sunshine and the sweet innocent flowers, if to love them is a sin? No, it is those who sin that refuse his good

gifts—who turn sweetness to gall, love to hatred, mercy to vengeance—not I, who would stretch out my hand and open my heart to receive all the glory He has made.” Her face flushed, and she sunk on her pillow, as though exhausted through excitement.

Meanwhile, Mathilde had taken some of the flowers from where she had first placed them, and was slowly leaving the room. Madame de Fontaine, on glancing up, saw that some flowers still remained in the vase.

“Did you hear what I said?” she exclaimed, with a surprised look at her eldest daughter.

“Yes,” faltered Mathilde, “but they are only fuchsias; they have no smell at all. I did not think they could be injurious.”

“I made no exceptions,” replied Madame de Fontaine; “you have no right to think upon the matter—it is your place to obey. Take away the flowers.”

Mathilde obeyed without another word.

“At least, draw up the blind and open the

window," exclaimed Adrienne, "that I may see them grow, and feel the fresh air. I shall die in this close dark room."

"You do not know what is good for you, Adrienne; there is too much light in the room already," replied Madame de Fontaine, drawing the blinds still closer.

"Shut out the light from my eyes as from my life," murmured Adrienne, as she turned her face wearily away, flung one arm round the neck of her dog, and tried to sleep.

Madame de Fontaine was an untiring nurse. She rarely left her daughter's bedside, except when she retired to rest at night. Silently and noiselessly she performed the duties of the sick chamber—never was exhausted, never seemed weary. She was always ready to administer the medicine at the proper time, and carried out scrupulously the doctor's orders, even in the most trifling particular. There was care and attention in every act, but not an atom of affection—not a grain of that love which would

have refreshed and strengthened the young girl's sinking spirit more than all the medicines she so carefully administered. Her loveless, soulless movements irritated Adrienne's sensitive spirit—doubly sensitive, now that she was weak and helpless. If her mother spoke in a voice ever so subdued and low, it still jarred on Adrienne's ear, and seemed to set some nervous power vibrating through her whole frame. Sometimes Madame de Fontaine would sit by the bedside for hours, with her hands folded in her lap, in marble stillness, lost in thought, the tremulous eyelid alone showing there was life within. At other times she would sit knitting vigorously, as though her very life depended on the speed of her work, and the number of her stitches; while Adrienne lay, with her eyes wide open, watching her, listening to the monotonous click, click, till her head swam, her brain grew confused, and her eyes magnified every object round her, each seeming to take some grotesque unearthly form.

The silence grew so oppressive, that she felt she must scream to rouse herself from the waking nightmare that weighed upon her senses. A loving look, a pleasant word or smile, the cheerful brighteners of the sick room, never came to Adrienne during her mother's vigils, which were long, and vigorously kept. She intended conscientiously to do her duty, and, so far as outward matters were concerned, she did it well. Her cold hands did their office, but their loveless, soulless touch chilled her poor patient through. Madame de Fontaine's stern hard nature had no need of tender affections, no appreciation of soft emotions; therefore she could not understand the craving of her daughter's gentle nature; for love was as essential to Adrienne's spirit, as light and air are to a flower. She soon learned to look forward with longing to Mr. Sterndale's brief visits; his coming was the one great event in her daily life. There seemed to be something health-giving in his presence—some invigorating power in the rich mellow

tones of his voice. Whenever he entered the sick room, he seemed to import some new element into it, to bring with him some airy influence from the outer world, which lightened the atmosphere, and had the same effect upon her spirits as the fresh sea-breeze may have upon the feverish brow, especially when it blows from the balmy south. Mr. Sterndale generally brought with him some kind message or token from the Rectory, thus he was doubly welcome to Adrienne.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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